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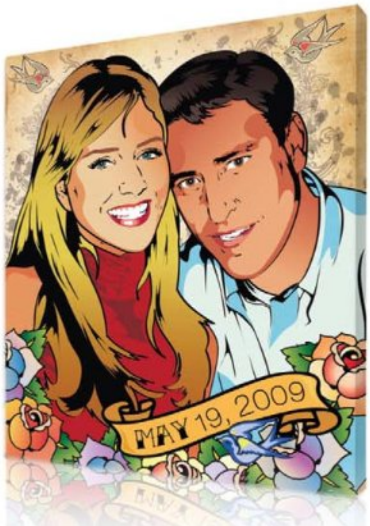
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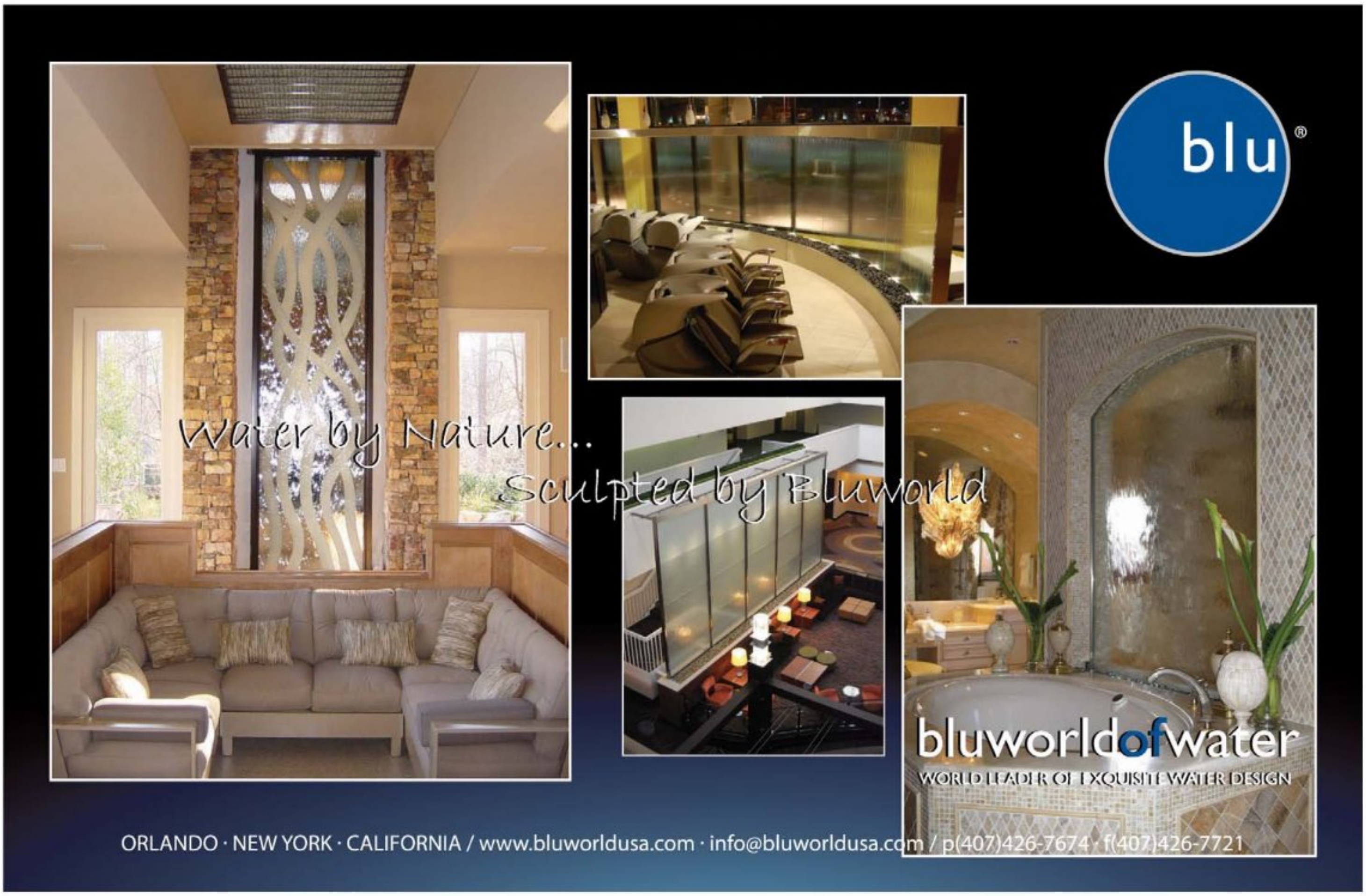
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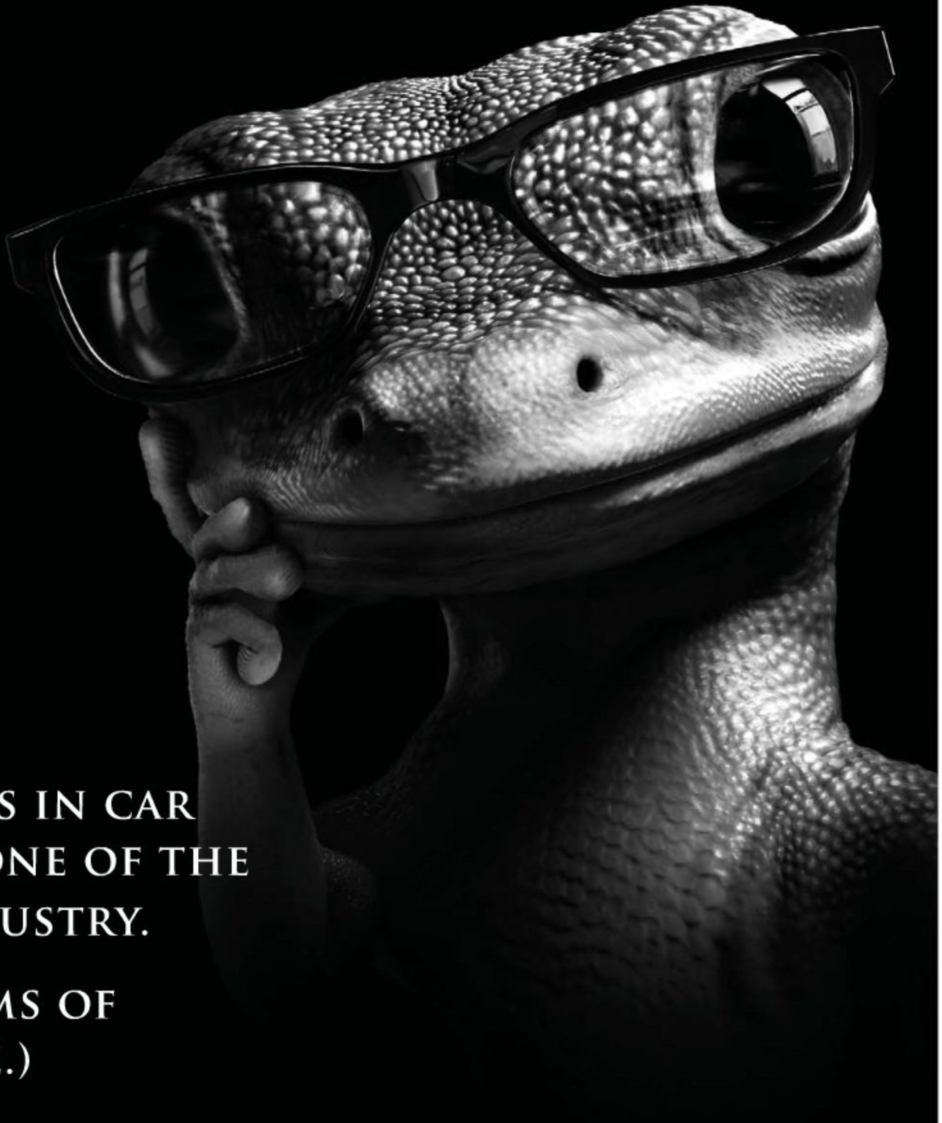
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"Regular houses are full of barriers. Even windows are psychological barriers. Here we slide open the walls and live in direct contact with nature."

Ken Meffan

Homework Assignment

I must confess, I am no expert when it comes to unraveling the tangled web of financing, banking, and policy that helps shape our economy. At Dwell, our most pressing inquiries tend to uncover how an architect overcame the limitations imposed by kitchen cabinets from Ikea, not the devastation wrought by mortgage-backed securities. Though we always factor cost into our coverage, it's generally considered as part of a larger package of what we consider good design. But writing about the trajectory of "The New American Home" (page 69), without acknowledging the economic slump would be folly—not only because of the ramifications it has on design, but also because of the potential that better design offers to pull us out of it.

Before the economic crisis, the housing industry produced upward of a million (even two million) new houses a year; banks encouraged pretty much anyone to buy a home; other banks packaged up all the debt and shopped it around; and as long as real-estate values went up, everyone stood to gain. Now that millions of homes are in foreclosure, prices have plummeted, and housing starts are at their lowest number in decades, it's clear that this didn't quite work out as planned.

There are many reasons for this, but I would like to focus on a particular aspect that generally will not rise to the forefront of other conversations on the topic—home design. Much like how the auto industry put all of its eggs into the SUV-basket for the last 20 years, for all of the millions of homes built, the housing industry offered a similarly limited and bloated array. The more-more-more, bigger-is-better mentality appears to serve everyone when the going is good, but when things tank, it becomes apparent that not only is all this stuff unnecessary, but it's dead wrong.

The good news is that all over the country individuals and savvy developers are already on the right track. For many years here at Dwell, we have shown that the importance of modern design isn't about being in fashion, but rather, that living with the principles espoused by modernism—using materials honestly, eliminating waste, honoring the environment in which we build—would enrich our living conditions and also the greater context of our lives.

The bad news is that even in the best of times modern architecture isn't exactly easy to finance. From Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion houses to Michelle Kaufmann prefabs, the harsh realities of banking have often kept the innovative possibilities of design at bay. Home financing depends in large part on resale value, and unfortunately a collective lack of imagination leads us to the one-size-fits-all recipe for beefed-up McMansions with man caves and granite counters, not experiments in living. But now, just as our Chryslers will become a lot more like Fiats, our homes will need to make a similar transformation.

In this issue we travel across the country to point to examples of this shift—thus far the exception, not the rule. Some argue that developments such as Office dA's Macallen Building in South Boston pave the way for gentrification and deplete local character. But as anyone who has seen the film *The Greening of Southie* (which tracks the structure's construction process) can attest, the building's ultimate value may not be for the residents who end up living there, but for the project's construction workers who were exposed to entirely different methodologies of building and living to take with them to their next jobs and communities.

Though the Macallen represents positive change at a niche level, I am even more hopeful when I see initiatives, like the new HUD-DOT-EPA Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities, that could have a much broader impact. The partnership includes measures to promote "transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling," the expansion of "location- and energy-efficient housing choices," and "locally generated renewable energy." It's important that these considerations are being made at a policy level, but we shouldn't sit idly by and expect things to be done right. As the homes in this issue attest, the future will be up to each of us.

Sam Grawe, Editor-in-Chief
sam@dwell.com


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Your Detour section has always reported on the cool things happening in different cities, so why didn't you do the same for Philadelphia ("Detour," July/August 2009)? Instead, you chose to interview a Philly novelist, Ken Kalfus, who must not get out much. Each of his answers either had a negative comment or unfulfilling observation. You should have interviewed Kalfus's architecture-critic wife, Inga Saffron, who has been writing about modern design in Philadelphia for many years and would have been able to share a number of interesting, unique experiences to be had here. Dwell should be uncovering successful modern design to educate and inspire its readers. Please give Philly another chance to flex its design muscles.

Ralph Tullie
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The June 2009 "Think Smaller" issue resonates with me, as you can imagine, given my dad Richard Neutra's Diatom series from 1925. His vision for this project, nearly 85 years ago, was truly prescient. The "smaller is better" Diatom was founded on patented prefab footings—the ultimate "floating lightly on the land" project. The prefab panels were made of diatomaceous earth slabs, which are sustainable and renewable, and save energy.

Diatom was only one of many prefab schemes we've experimented with. Channel Heights, a project from 1942, was another such experiment in minimalism. Here again, the floor areas of the units were very compact. Despite some pretty spectacular larger houses, the majority of our work has always had as its basic challenge: Think smaller, if not less expensively.

Recently I've been approached by several prefab builders asking if I would design a "Neutra" model. I've thought seriously about resurrecting the Diatom as a model that would have relevance today.

Keep up the great work.

Dion Neutra, AIA
Neutra Institute for Survival Through Design

I look forward to receiving my copy of Dwell each month, as it fills a niche in my reading and provides inspiration that few other publications can offer. I especially enjoyed the "Editor's Note" in the June 2009 issue ("Ooops!…We Built It Again"). What a relief that it is no longer treason against the shared American Dream to talk (and publish) openly about excess. Excess has overtaken us on so many levels: the surplus of McMansions with fake aging Tuscan stucco, driveways decorated with huge military-like vehicles that are only used to transport armies of plastic grocery bags, and the social pressure to maintain Kentucky bluegrass front lawns even in our deserts in Utah.

I'd like to add to the list of bad design. When did we as Americans decide that using a gas-powered leaf-blower instead of a broom was somehow a more professional way of dealing with grass clippings on a driveway? It has nothing to do with time savings nor effectiveness for sure—as those concerns would foster grass catchers on mowers to prevent the need for an additional step of sweeping. Landscape blowers are my nomination for bad design; they're not economical, environmentally responsible, nor aesthetically pleasing and do not have any lasting value. What were we thinking!? Now I'll get off my broom…to address my own excesses.

Marlene Cox
Salt Lake City, Utah

"A Narrow Victory" (June 2009, p. 82) featured a fold-down table as part of a built-in bookshelf. Could you tell me where I can find it or the plans to make one?

Rebecca Silva
Portland, Oregon

Editors' Note: The table and bookshelf were custom designed by STRand, a design firm in Virginia. The designers suggest using Soss invisible closer hinges if you're planning to build one yourself. For more information, visit the firm's website at strandworks.com or contact them at strandemail@gmail.com.

Thank you for "An Introduction to Airport Design" (June 2009). I've long been intrigued by reframing transitional spaces as destinations of their ▸



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own. While the Changi Airport in Singapore is impressive, I find the interior design of the international terminal in Vancouver more welcoming for this weary traveler. Forms of granite, jade, cedar, glass, and water simultaneously comfort, inform, and greet the international traveler in the progression from the arriving flight to the customs line. A new light-rail line will be connecting the airport to downtown, providing another measure of welcome. Parents of small children also have distinct airport needs. A memorable layover for my young daughter was in Detroit with its hushed red monorail.

Rachel Hollowgrass
Oakland, California

The May 2009 issue was mind-blowing. Each page brought delight and awe. I took in just a bit at a time and saved the rest for another time to relax and refresh. It was like a good book that one hates to see end—but it didn't end because there is the next issue to look forward to.

Ricki de Kramer
South Pasadena, California



I have a question for Dan Maginn ("At Home in the Zone," May 2009) and even did a collage to illustrate it (see the above image). If we use reusable shopping bags, are we supposed to buy plastic bags for our garbage? I use paper. It seems the best solution for me. But I want to do what is best for the environment.

Kim Smith
San Francisco, California

"At Home in the Zone" (May 2009) is a brochure wanting to be born. It is colorful, humorous, and factual. It is just the thing needed to make the idea of going green interesting and more doable for all of us "regular" people. Please consider publishing it as a stand-alone brochure or pamphlet.

Sigrid Benson
Gulf Breeze, Florida

I am a ninth-grade home-school student and adore Dwell. Although I usually just look at the pictures, the "Before and After" stories in the April 2009 issue really caught my attention. Though I have always hoped that my future home will look like something in the magazine, I've never been sure how I will get there. The houses in the magazine are already perfect and beautiful; it seems like they are without a beginning. Where do they start? This has been one of my major questions since I began reading Dwell. However, seeing the three featured "Before and After" homes go from average houses to modern unique homes has answered my question as well as offered encouragement.

Madison Vander Ark
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Do you have any information about the glass coffee table shown in the atrium living room of the Segerholt Residence ("Just Do It," p. 91, April 2009)?

Murray McKay
Houston, Texas

Editors' Note: The piece is the Split Rail coffee table from Modernica. For more information, visit modernica.net.

Correction: In our July/August 2009 issue, we failed to attribute our Dwellings introduction ("Barn Again," p. 78) to our fabulous former senior editor, Geoff Manaugh. We regret this most egregious oversight.

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Dwell and Inhabitat's 2009 Design Competition

This summer, Dwell partnered with Inhabitat.com for our first joint design competition. We called for forward-thinking ideas on how to redesign and improve upon the tract homes, strip malls, cul-de-sacs, big-box stores, and parking lots that spill across our sprawling suburbs in order to explore the future of the built environment. Look for the competition winners to be announced on dwell.com.
re-burbia.com



Kevin Freeman helps his wife, Jen Feldmann, find her balance at their Houston home. See more photos on page 80 and at dwell.com.

Photo by Jack Thompson

CONTRIBUTORS

Aya Brackett
While shooting dishwasher expert Ginny Evans ("Dwell Reports," p. 62), San Francisco–based photographer Aya Brackett celebrated the purchase of her very first dishwasher, a Bosch. Evans suggested meal ideas (barley risotto, red-lentil daal, black-eyed-pea salad) that now seem perfectly doable with the requisite clean-up time half of what it used to be.

David A. Greene
Los Angeles–based writer David A. Greene didn't know what to expect when he traveled to Rough and Ready, California, to meet with Ken Meffan ("My House," p. 51), but he was glad he got the full insurance package on his rental car. After bouncing down a rutted dirt road and onto a narrow bridge to cross a creek, he was serenaded by bullfrogs—and then later snacked on by mosquitoes.

Todd Hido
San Francisco Bay Area–based artist Todd Hido traveled to Rough and Ready, California, to photograph this month's "My House" (p. 51). "I felt right at home shooting out in the woods," Hido says. "The way the kids played in the stream reminded me of myself as a child: I don't think there was a day I came home with dry shoes."

Blair Kamin
Blair Kamin is the *Chicago Tribune*'s Pulitzer Prize–winning architecture critic and the co-owner of a suburban home that, despite waves of renovation, will never make the pages of Dwell. Kamin typically writes about large-scale projects and was delighted to turn his focus to a small-scale home rehab for a couple whose lifestyle is anything but conventional ("Brick by Brick," p. 96). "It was great to observe the direct connection between their quirks and the completed house."

James Nestor
While in Norway surfing in the waters of the Arctic Circle, writer James Nestor was introduced to the beauty of the grass roof by a self-professed Viking. Over a few shots of the national elixir, Aquavit, Nestor learned that the roofs are making a modern-day comeback. He wrote about them for this month's "Off the Grid" (p. 58).

Gregg Segal
Gregg Segal, a photographer based in Altadena, California, traveled to Chicago's West Side to shoot Studio Gang's Brick Weave House ("Brick by Brick," p. 96). Segal much admired homeowners Tereasa Surratt and David Gonzales's decorating rule: nothing over $25. There were nude studies from a thrift store, an Eames lounge chair rescued from a Dumpster, and even an unknown artist's canvas that they found on nearby train tracks.

Jack Thompson
After traveling along the West Coast for three weeks, photographer Jack Thompson made a mad dash to Texas to shoot "a pretty cool house with a great design using shipping containers" ("The Shipping Muse," p. 80). Almost every shoot that Thompson has done for Dwell has involved large amounts of rain and thunder, so he advises giving him a call if you have a house located somewhere in need of precipitation.

Alissa Walker
True to her name, Los Angeles–based writer Alissa Walker ditched her Subaru three years ago, preferring pedestrian, pedaled, or public forms of transportation. Now she spots lots more like her around town. "Everyone likes to paint L.A. as this chained-to-our-cars city, but it's quickly changing." For this issue, Walker wrote about how residents like herself can thrive in high-density urban environments ("The New American Home," p. 69).

Dave Weinstein
Dave Weinstein is a freelance writer who penned this month's "Modern Real Estate 101" (p. 108). He spends his spare time walking his spaniel through architecturally interesting neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area and is an active preservationist, most notably for his hometown's art deco jewel, the Cerrito Theater.



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In the Modern World



When a Mexico City couple dreamed of living the (larger than) life aquatic, architect Javier Senosiain made their wish a composite concrete reality. The Nautilus is a land-bound residence that takes its structural cues from the spiral shape of that mollusk's shell—albeit one accented with stained glass, colorful tiling, and an indoor natural grass carpet, shown here in the largest room of the whorled home. arquitecturaorganica.com

Photo by Jaime Jacott

October on View
Important dates in art and design, with architecture thrown in for good measure: Welcome to Dwell's timeline of the month.

October 4
The Martin-Gropius-Bau's exhibit celebrates the Bauhaus in Berlin then travels to New York. gropiusbau.de

Pratt Design for a Dollar

Students are notoriously adept at making the best of a tight budget. Though it might be a while before ramen and Natty Ice are considered haute cuisine, the students at Pratt Institute's Department of Industrial Design proved that at least design innovation doesn't have to be born out of the big bucks. The theme for the school's installation at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair, held in New York City in May, was simple: Make products for the modest cost of a single single. The selection maximized materials that won't break the bank and transformed industrial waste into product gold.
pratt.edu

1. Crystal chandelier *by Jennie Maneri*
2. The Drip plate *by Cat Merrick*
3. Metamorphosis *by Sukmo Koo and Young Taek Oh*
4. Bottle Cap bowl *by Austin Doten*
5. GiftCard buttons *by Sara Dierck*
6. New Luxuries: The Paper Bailout Bag *by Rebecca Cole Marshall*
7. The Rope chandelier *by Amyel Oliveros*
8. Mag stool *by Li-Rong Liao*
9. Jewelry *by Naima Frankel*
10. Cumulus table *by Daniel Jeffries*
11. Sleeve *by Sara Ebert*
12. Scissors *by Brian Persico*

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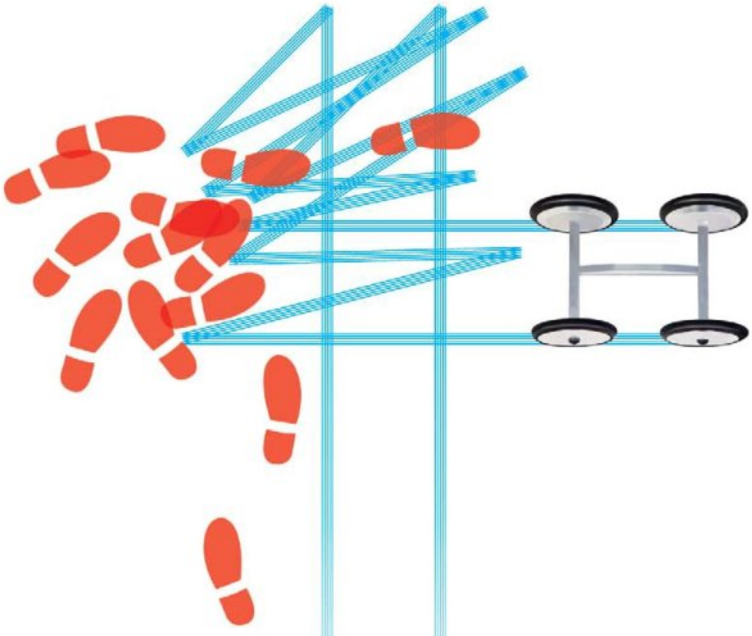

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11


12


October 4
Super Contemporary, a showcase of the best of British creativity, closes at the Design Museum in London. designmuseum.org

October 12
Catch the Canadian Centre for Architecture's *Speed Limits* exhibition before it closes in Montreal. cca.qc.ca





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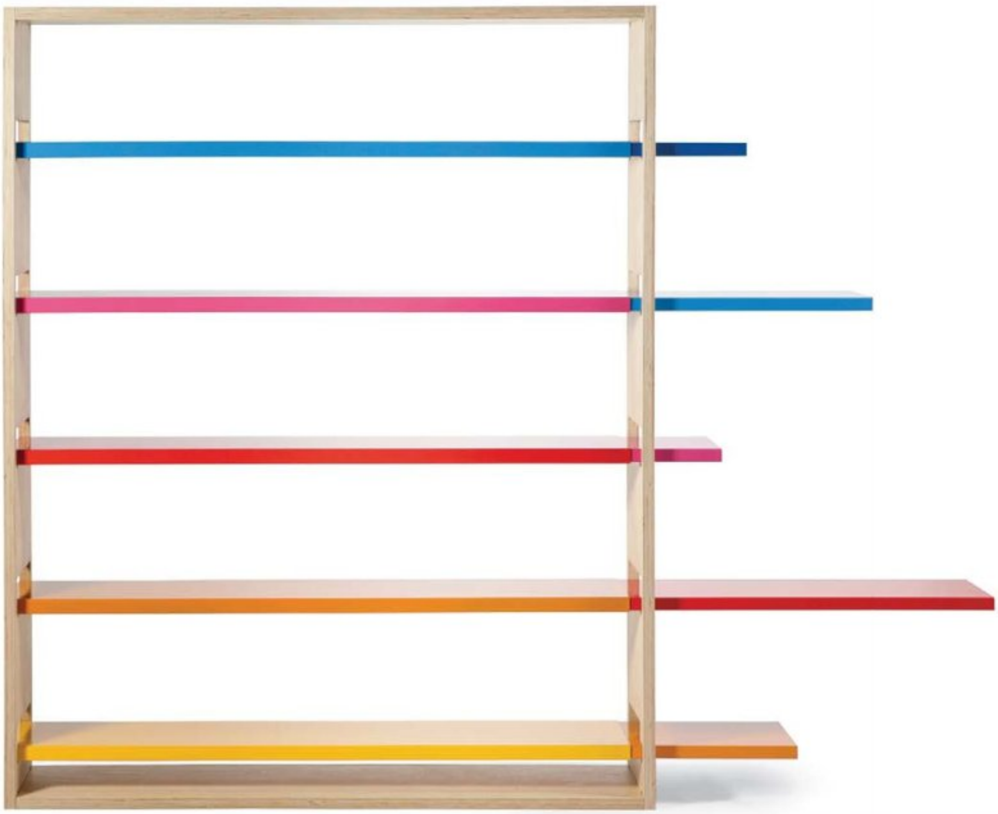
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By Chris Adamick for Test Collective
testcollective.com
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By Jon Gasca for Stua
stua.com
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Sunset
By Stone Designs for RS
rs-life.com
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October 16
Design USA: Contemporary Innovation opens at the Cooper-Hewitt in New York. cooperhewitt.org.

October 17
House of Cars: Innovation and the Parking Garage opens at the National Building Museum in Washington, DC. nbm.org


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PS Pelle
By Hella Jongerius for Ikea
ikea.com
Far more good fortune than a rabbit's foot, this wall hanging was inspired by the fauna of Swedish fairy tales and hand-embroidered by women in Northern Indian villages as part of a program between Ikea and UNICEF. (*left*)

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By Vincent and Paul Georgeson for Misewell
misewell.com
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Angled end tables
By Kurt Dexel for Dexel Crafted
dexelcrafted.com
The Slinky stabilized ship equipment before it became a toy; penicillin was merely mold until its use as a medical treatment. Sometimes an accident can be the impetus for an amazing discovery, and Kurt Dexel's Angular collection strengthens the case for fortuity. The pieces in this line—like these white oak and wenge veneer end tables—were inspired by a triangular offcut that was discarded from another one of his projects.

Stilt
By Blu Dot
bludot.com
A simple pivot of this tripod lamp's walnut legs will put them in line for easy flat-packing.





October 18
Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet closes at London's Barbican Art Gallery. barbican.org.uk

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John Cronin



For 35 years, John Cronin has safeguarded New York's waterways, investigating dozens of pollution cases and authoring three laws to protect the Hudson River and its communities. So when Cronin, director and CEO of the Beacon Institute for Rivers and Estuaries, began planning the institute's first research facility, the Center for Environmental Innovation and Education, he knew its physical form should embody its ecological ideals. Instead of just building green, he went one better: Working with international architecture and design firm Gensler, he transformed an abandoned 19th-century brick factory into a state-of-the-art structure packed with sustainable technologies.

Cronin found the dilapidated 4,000-square-foot building in Beacon, New York, on a former industrial section of Denning's Point State Park. "It was covered with vines, all the windows were gone, there were big holes in the roof, and its cement slabs were cracked and heaved," he says. Physical limitations determined what interventions could—and could not—be made.

Gensler's solution was to restore the building's envelope and reengineer its interior. The team shored up the structure's walls, then added a mezzanine to its main room, and an extension to its western facade. They introduced sustainable features—like geothermal heating and composting toilets—wherever the building could support them. "We couldn't use as much solar as we wanted to because the roof has a pretty steep pitch, and there are a lot of trees," Cronin says. Instead, three wind towers straddle the roof and passively cool the interiors via computer-operated vents.

During the two-year construction phase, Cronin received first-hand lessons in the challenges of adaptive restoration, from replacing rotten trusses to repairing a broken sewage main. The perseverance paid off, and the center opened last December. Vying for LEED Platinum certification, it shows that when done right, our built environment can not only respect but also preserve nature—a point Cronin hopes we all take to heart.

—Julie Taraska

thebeaconinstitute.org



Philippe Starck

Both worshipped and reviled, Philippe Starck has served as king and jester to the design world for the last 30 years. His designs, such as Juicy Salif, that ubiquitous postmodern kitchen implement, or his oft-heralded, seldom-purchased line of products for Target, elicit equal amounts of distinction and condemnation. A champion of mass production (and a self-made marketing tool), Starck has fashioned his own playful world in which we all can carouse. Dwell caught up with him in New York at the launch of his Zimku speakers for Parrot.

Lucky break: My lucky break is perhaps an unlucky break: It's the mental sickness of creativity mixed with a very heavy religious education. I'm not a believer, but I do believe we all have to try to deserve to exist.

Dream commission: To make something useful with materiality. Today 90 percent of the services we receive from companies are material. It's time to kill materiality.

Hero: I really love this guy Ptolemy. He lived 100 years after Jesus Christ. He took the measurement of the world within 2 percent. Until the 16th century this measurment was exact. That is genius.

Villian: All the cynical people who use intelligence to lie and to steal money from others.

Greatest compliment: "Thank you!"

Currently reading: I read something like 12 books at a time. One you might know in the United States is *Snuff* by Chuck Palahniuk.

Last film watched: I only ever get to see movies on the plane, because I have no time to watch films or TV. Last night I saw *Milk*, and I was very impressed by Sean Penn. He is astonishing! I love this type of movie because it helps us understand the suffering of other people.

iPods: I have 15. Thirteen of them are loaded exactly the same, because I have a phobia of losing one while traveling. I keep them in Ziploc bags in a safety box. Yesterday I got two more from Stephan Crasneanscki of Soundwalk. He made me a 24-hour mix of the music of my soul, and now I always have the right music at the right time of day.

Your "Eureka!" moment: All the time, but I'm not talking about the quality of the "Eureka!" and I'm not talking about the result of the idea. Some people, like me, are purely intuitive—absolutely not intelligent—and have a diagonal way of thinking.

Best seat in the house: In my bed with my wife.

Things you won't design: Weapons, tobacco, hard alcohol, anything with religion, anything with oil companies, and anything coming from dirty money.

Looking forward to: Sleeping.



starck.com

Illustration by Elisabeth Moch

Nice Modernist Q & A

01



02



03



04



05



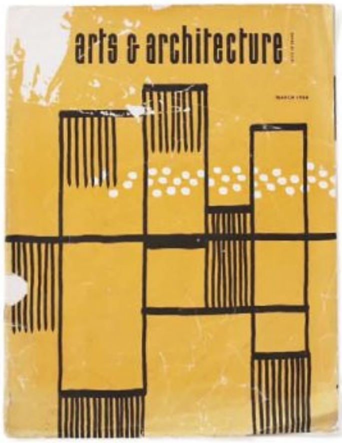
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09



customer file № 002 11 00747 134

Paul Blanchard / Santa Barbara CA

01 The Non Random lamp just delivered from YLighting
02 The radio that I listen to in my workshop
03 A desktop clock I received for fathers day
04 The Marc Newson flashlight that hangs in my kitchen
05 Three years worth of delivered newspapers
06 A recent purchase that lets me forget my age
07 Rubber vase from NYC that fit into my carry-on
08 Prized 1960 Art & Architecture from my collection
09 My grandfather's hammer
10 The cruiser that gets me to the coffee shop every day

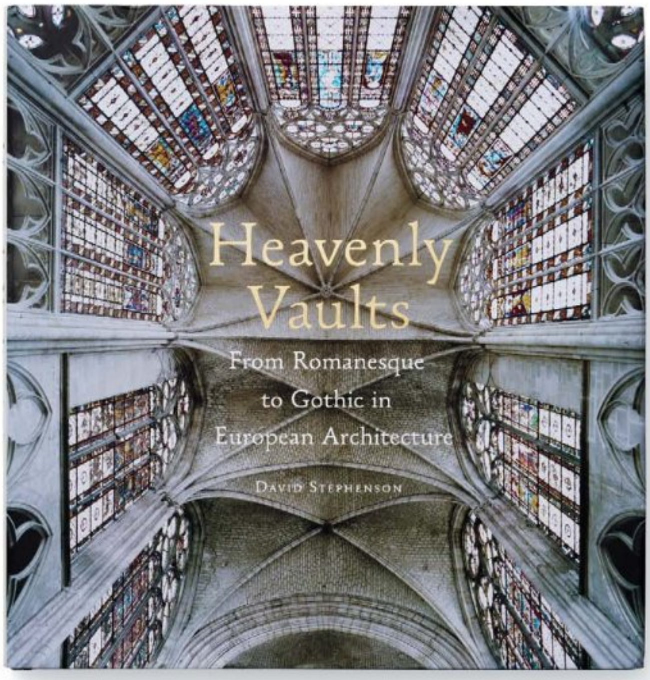
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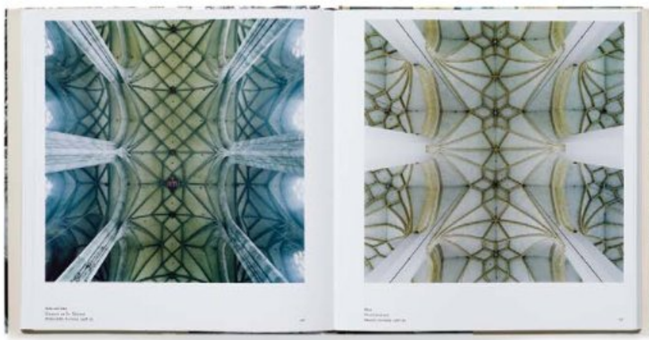
***Heavenly Vaults*: From Romanesque to Gothic in European Architecture**
David Stephenson
Princeton Architectural Press, $65

David Stephenson's new book of photography is a love letter to the intricate, seemingly sui generis vaults of Europe's Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals and churches. Half the wonder of these soaring architectural feats is that they were devised and built at all. The other half comes with the realization that we will never build this way again: It takes too long. It's too expensive. We don't know how.

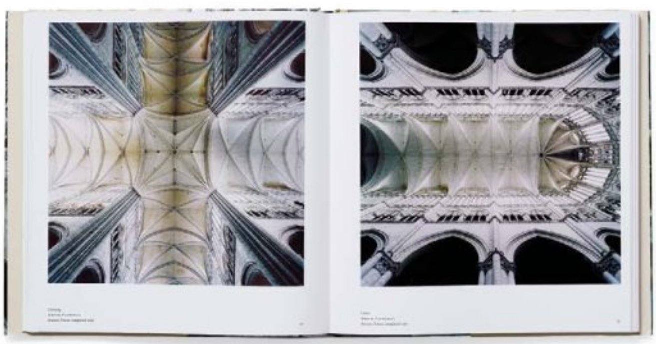
These buildings, some nearly a millennium old, are charged with the grandeur of God, as though their architects, suddenly doubting that it could be read in nature, decided to codify it in stone. The skyward vaults suggest their faith's holy order, the majestic possibilities of men working to glorify their creator, the intimation, the endurance of infinity.











Photos by Peter Belanger

October 19
Relinquish self-control and visit *Ron Arad: No Discipline*, which closes at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. moma.org


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Photo by Cristobal Palma

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Koppany Pool House
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Pierre Koenig
usc.edu/dept/architecture/slide/koenig/



Photos by Julius Shulman and Juergen Nogai

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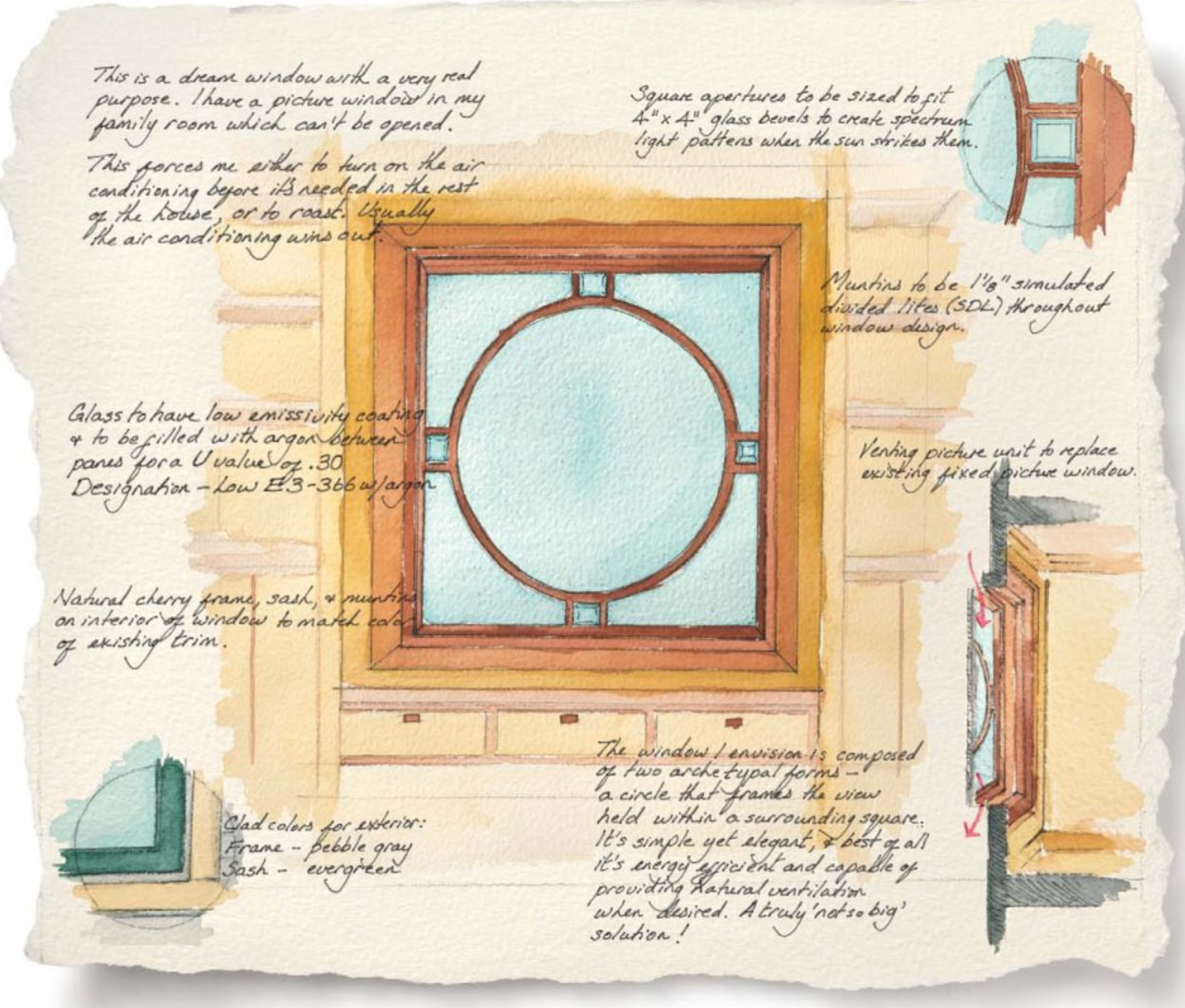


Wolfe Den
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Photos by Michael Moran (House on the Hill), Viviane Vives/Barcelona Films (Wolfe Den)

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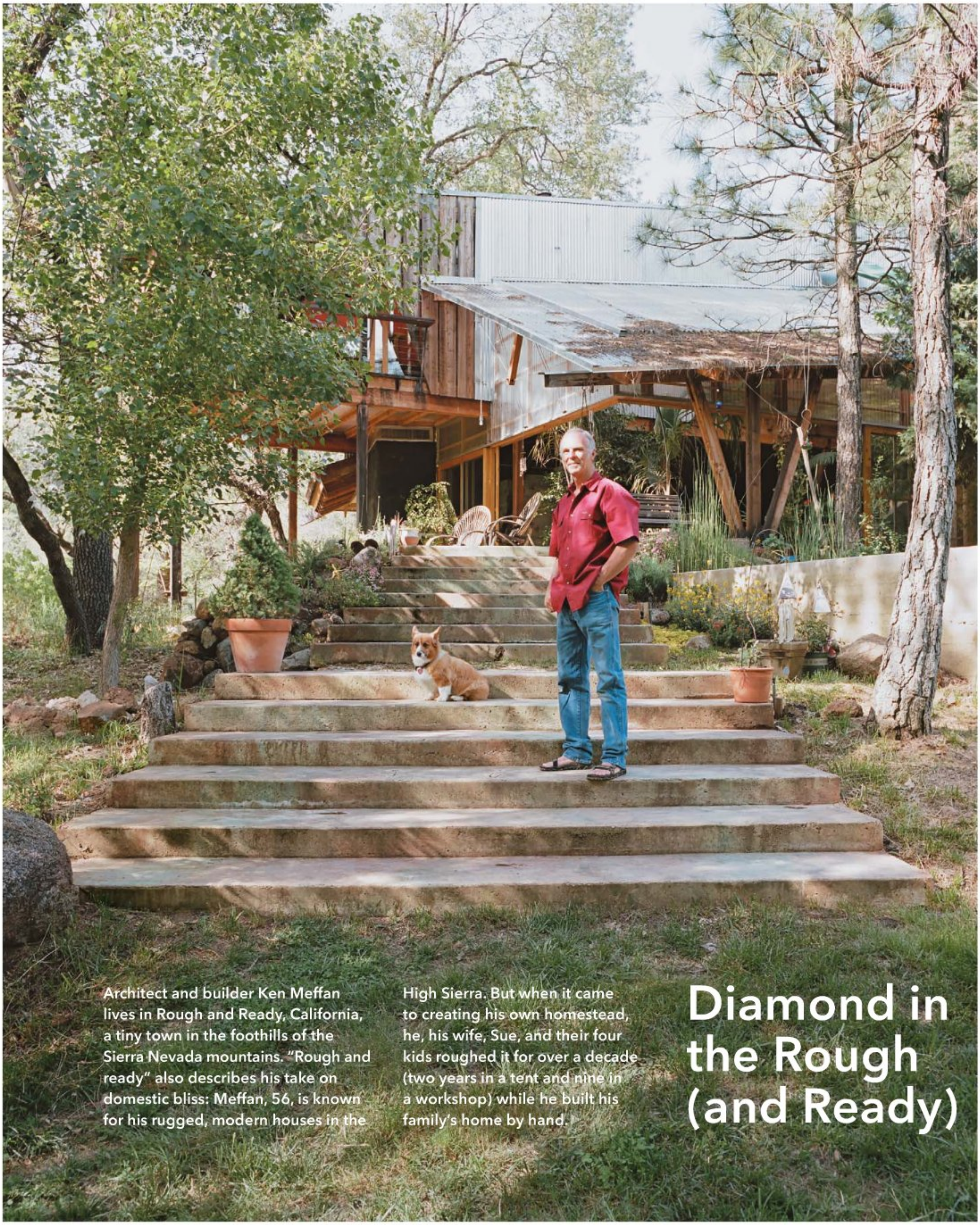
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Diamond in the Rough (and Ready)

Architect and builder Ken Meffan lives in Rough and Ready, California, a tiny town in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. "Rough and ready" also describes his take on domestic bliss: Meffan, 56, is known for his rugged, modern houses in the High Sierra. But when it came to creating his own homestead, he, his wife, Sue, and their four kids roughed it for over a decade (two years in a tent and nine in a workshop) while he built his family's home by hand.

Story by David A. Greene
Photos by Todd Hido



This was a really difficult site to build on, because there's so much water. A creek runs through it, and there are springs all over the place. But we love the water, and so do the kids. They dam the creek up every summer for swimming, and it collects silt in the winter, which makes great compost for the garden. Last year, we grew sunflowers that must have been 12 feet tall.

There are two structures on the property: the little workshop, where we lived for almost ten years, and the main house. Before the workshop, we lived in a tent. We were very poor, but we were having an adventure, like the Swiss Family Robinson—until a giant, once-every-20-years rainstorm pretty much blew us away. The morning after the storm was over, the kids came to me and said, "Dad, this isn't so much fun anymore."

We only had two of the four kids when I started building the main house, and as the family grew, we kept adding bedrooms. Officially, it's 3,400 square feet, but half of that is a greenhouse. When I was a young architect in Malibu, I hired a landscaper who took me to a greenhouse tucked back in one of the canyons. It was crammed full of plants, and when we squeezed down one aisle, he said, "Just take a deep breath." And when I breathed that pure, oxygen-fortified air, I knew that I wanted to build a house just like that.

Regular houses are full of barriers. Even windows are psychological barriers. Here, we slide open the walls and live in direct contact with nature. You can feel the weather in here. I was on a business call once when it was raining; it was this tremendous downpour, where the sky just opened up, and I couldn't hear or talk. That's what this house is all about.

Living with wildlife is also important. We get lizards inside and don't bother to run them out. We've had wild turkeys wander in, and a baby squirrel used to sleep with the kids. We have tons of people here all the time, too. I've stopped noticing when there's an extra kid or two in the house.

I consider this house a prototype. Some of its features I wouldn't dare ▶





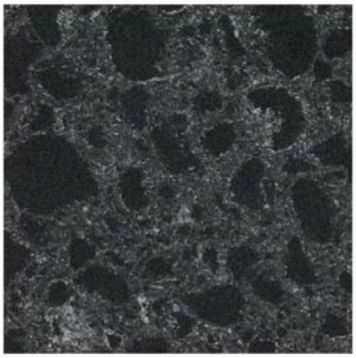


"In a regular house you can't hear the birds or feel the fresh air," says Meffan, contrasting it with his greenhouse-within-a-house (top right). Though all the plants are mundane home-center varieties (top left), they grow to uncanny heights in the moist, sunny environment. Sue (bottom right) waters the indoor foliage with an industrial hose hung from the ceiling, while Dylan, 10, and Zoe, 13 (bottom left), have a lazy float down the creek, Huck Finn-style, in a steel horse-watering tank.

Color Expression[09]



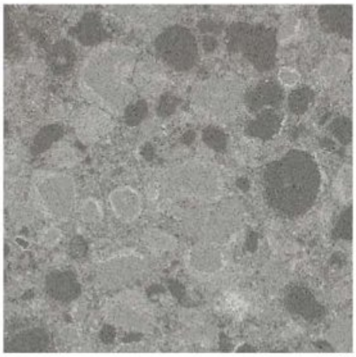
Basalt Black 6185T

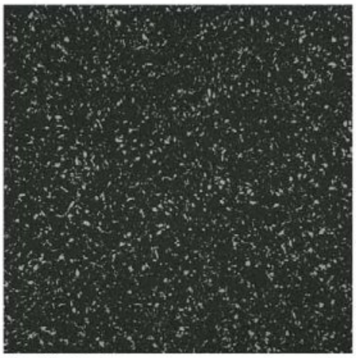

Black Rocks 4170





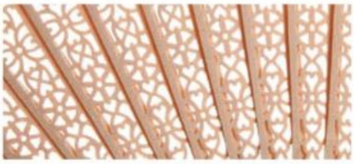
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build for customers, in case they don't work out. Like the garage-door "sunroof" in our bedroom, or the sliding glass walls. When I build those walls for customers, I buy cool, superexpensive hardware from Germany, with big lever handles. Here, I tried something different, putting them on Rollerblade wheels. They worked out wonderfully, though! The flip side of experimenting is that the inspection process can be a real drag. I had to get a rural occupancy permit for us to live out here. And I had to block off the spot where the fireman's pole was supposed to go.

For the walls, my theory was "anything but drywall." The walls on the ground floor are straw bales, covered with clay mud dug from the site. And a lot of the wood upstairs is salvaged. When I build big vacation houses for other people, we usually clear a bunch of trees on the location and mill them into lumber onsite. And then when the job is over, I just drag home whatever's left and use it around here.

There's corrugated polycarbonate on the roof of the greenhouse and corrugated galvanized siding out on the workshop. I consider it an indigenous material. In nearby gold-mining towns like Grass Valley and Nevada City, the forty-niners used corrugated metal extensively, probably because it was a cheap material. They built a lot of Victorian houses, too, but those don't stimulate me as much as an old barn does, or an old mine building. If you make a building too perfect, it doesn't give you that interesting feel. You don't want your house to feel like a modern furniture store.

I grew up in suburbia, in Redondo Beach, California, and I think our environment here is a rebellion against that. Once, I wondered if the kids might be better off somewhere else, so I asked them what they thought about living here. They said, "Are you kidding, Dad? We love it here." They don't know anything different, of course. But they will. My 20-year-old daughter lives down in San Luis Obispo now, and she thought it was so great to have her own apartment. But after two weeks of sitting in that drywall box, she started to appreciate what she had up here in Rough and Ready. We're pretty good with weird around here. It's a little on the funky side, but it's home.

Rocks dug up during construction were saved and incorporated into the poured-concrete floors and walls (above left). Hydronic heating coils in the floor are augmented by a woodstove during the damp winters. Cody, 17, and Dylan (top right) jam in the kitchen with Yogi, the Welsh corgi. The front door (above right) is made from remilled old leftover beams. A custom pivot mechanism allows the weight of the massive door to rest on a tiny point, allowing for almost friction-free operation.

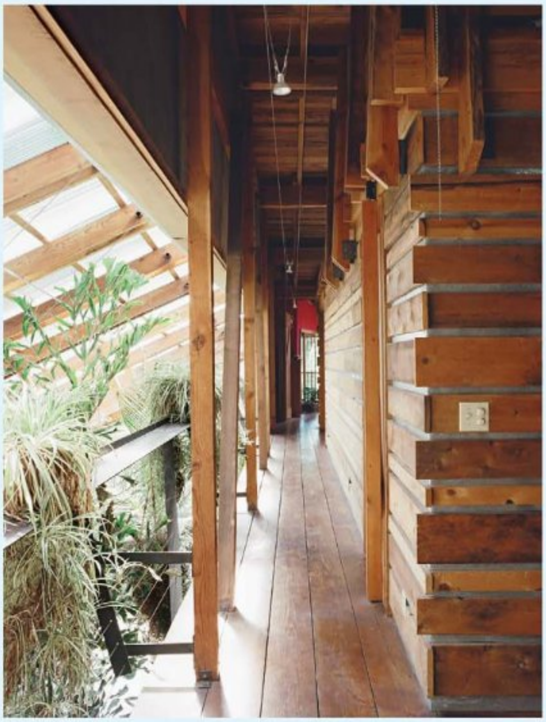


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By the Power of Gray Culls

The floorboards are lumberyard "culls" that had turned gray or cracked from being exposed to weather. Meffan had them remilled into pristine planks with an old-world feel. Contractors typically pass up culls to get to the "good" wood below. Ask at your local home center, and you may be able to get them at a steep discount, or even for free.

Spin Doctored

A media storage unit is made from a steel pivot welded to a heavy-duty tractor bearing by Sierra Metal Fabricators. The massive, smooth-spinning unit also serves as a room divider, to screen a desk and computer station from the main living area. sierrametal.com

Leaf Press-Ons

As Meffan was hand-troweling the concrete floor, his daughter ran in with different leaf specimens from the property, like ferns and bamboo. Meffan pressed the leaves into the drying concrete and later swept the crumbling leaves away, leaving "fossil" impressions in the floor. The floor was then sealed with a nontoxic acrylic.



Trough Trade

The showers are made from stock-watering tanks from the Ideal Stock Tank Co. and have waterproof canvas curtains. Less expensive than prefab shower-tub units, stock tanks are built of weatherproof galvanized steel and are sturdy enough for cows to drink from—and, ergo, for you to bathe in.

Dam Kids

The young Meffans relish playing in the creek's adjustable dam, made from poured concrete. The nutrient-rich silt that collects over the summer is dumped on the vegetable garden in the winter, when the creek flows freely.



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Highly Sod After

In southwest Poland, architect Robert Konieczny, of KWK Promes, raises the roof—with sod intact—on Jacek Perkowski's modernist rural getaway.



It is Thursday evening, time to water the lawn. Jacek Perkowski slips on some flip-flops and walks through a glass door in his open-air living room. He grabs a hose and gets to work. But Perkowski isn't watering the grass in his yard; he's watering his roof. There, above the rafters of his three-bedroom house, a seven-inch-deep carpet of sod grows in green velvet chunks. "The idea of having parties on the roof, this kind of thing, was very important for me," says Perkowski, a Polish rock musician and former member of T. Love. "It's another way of enjoying and living in and around the house."

Perkowski isn't alone. While in the wilds of Książnice, Poland, where Perkowski lives, a yard on the roof may be seen as eccentric, throughout much of Europe sod roofs are becoming common. About 10 percent of German roofs have been "greened," many with sod, and Great Britain hopes to catch up to this number soon. Since January of 2004, over 3 million square feet of greater London's roofs have been turned into green space. Green Roofs for Healthy Cities (GRHC), an industry association of green roof builders in North America, estimates that its U.S. members installed more than 2.6 million square feet of green roofs in 2008, a 35 percent increase over the year before.

But beyond being a good place to sip a drink or host a party, what's the benefit of having to water and mow your roof? "There are hundreds of benefits, actually, both financial and environmental," says Steven Peck, president of GRHC. "Sod roofs [and other green roofs] retain heat in the winter and cool a house in the summer, saving about 25 percent per year in climate-energy costs." Peck says that many new houses built with green or grass roofs require smaller, less ▸

Photos by OUTrial House/Juliusz Sokolowski

Story by James Nestor

Though the three-bedroom house is two stories, both floors offer "front" lawns on which to hang out, all accessible through sliding glass doors.

Architect Konieczny lifted the existing ground and wrapped it around the roof and exterior rooftop staircase, essentially making all floors "ground" level.

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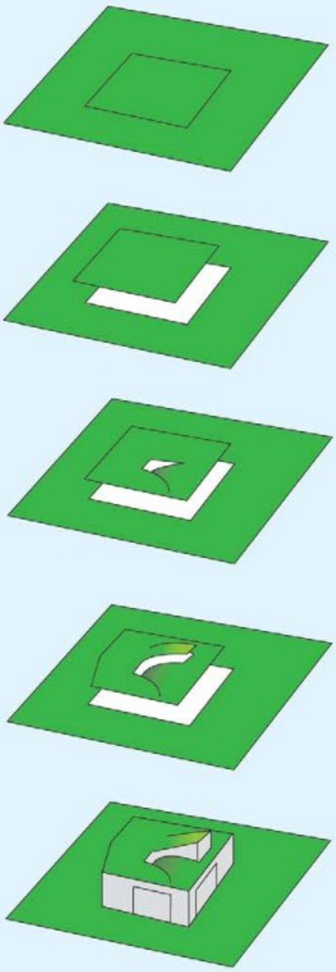
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Touch of Grass

To architect Robert Konieczny, the best way to integrate the OUTrial house into its surroundings was to make it out of its surroundings. By cutting notches in the sod and pushing the frame of the house up from beneath it, Konieczny gives the house the impression that it is popping up like a flower from the surrounding field—not erasing the earth on which it stands but simply displacing it to upper floors.



expensive heating systems. And they are quiet, insulating a building's interior from street noise. Then there are the environmental benefits. A single 16-square-foot roof of uncut grass produces the amount of oxygen that one person breathes in an entire year and removes up to 4.4 pounds of airborne pollution annually. Depending on the depth of growing media and the frequency and duration of rainfall, green and grass roofs also retain anywhere from 10 to 95 percent of the precipitation that falls on them, greatly inhibiting runoff and decreasing floods. And the list goes on.

Scandinavians have known the wonders of sod roofs for thousands of years. "Between 5 and 10 percent of the houses here still are sod," says Tórálvur Weihe, head of the department of historical and protected buildings at the National Museum of Faroe Islands. Here, in this cluster of 18 mystical islands in the North Sea lodged between Iceland and Ireland, is one of the highest concentrations of sod roofs in the world. The Faroese continue to employ an age-old method of building sod roofs: Base layers of birch bark (or sheets of knobbed plastic) are placed on roof panels, then covered with sod cut from surrounding yards. It's as simple as that. "When covered in sod, the roofs can last about 50 years without any reconstruction—about five times longer than a standard asphalt roof," Weihe says.

But before you start digging up your front yard, consider that not every house can support a sod roof. "This is not a do-it-yourself technology—there are serious structural implications and a lot of things that need to be considered before grass roofing," says Peck.

To ensure standards are met, in May 2009 GRHC debuted a Green Roof Professional (GRP) certification program for green roof developers. Similar to LEED certification (the U.S. rating system for environmental design), the GRP program establishes guidelines and systems for green and grass roofs. The first four-day training course GRHC offered for GRP certification sold out.



Back in Poland, Robert Konieczny, owner of Katowice-based KWK Promes and architect of Perkowski's sod-roofed house, says his attraction to sod roofs was less about making the roof like the front yard than about making it an extension of the ground. "We wanted to keep the fluidity of the grassy clearing surrounded by the forest where the house is located," says Konieczny. "Instead of just cutting and moving grass onto the roof of the house, we bent the ground up around the house." Doors and walkways that might ordinarily lead to a yard lead instead to the sod roof area, making the rooftop indistinguishable from the surrounding grass flats and creating what Konieczny calls an outside atrium. "The goal was to create a new type of space," says Konieczny. His inventive approach earned the project a nomination for the European Union's 2008 Mies van der Rohe Award.

Konieczny is planning similar sod roofs for upcoming projects. "It's wonderful. Not only does it create a very positive microclimate inside the house, but for me, sod versus other green roofs is much less hassle to maintain. And I love the appearance of having grass on a roof."

And, lest we forget, it's a great place to party.

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To learn about green and grass roofs, visit greenroofs.org.

The expansive open-air living room on the first floor is framed with a curving wall of windows. The glass wall works as an outdoor atrium looking out on an exposed sod-covered staircase and allows the room to be bathed in natural light.


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Dishwashing used to entail a sink full of soapy suds and a good scrubbing brush—and for some of us, it still does—but now, the task can also be done with just a push of a button. Despite its apparent ease, using a dishwasher can be more complicated than putting in a little old-fashioned elbow grease. For example, should you use gel, powder, or tablet detergent? The experts say tablets. Should plastic spoons still be relegated to the top rack? If you have an old machine with a heat coil at the bottom, yes. Rinse before washing? The jury's still out—but Mom says you must.

Today's dishwashers boast not only high-tech designs but a host of innovative features that make dishes cleaner. Water is warmed as it flows through heaters and softened with built-in salt depositories. Detergents are evenly distributed throughout the machine instead of clumping on the bottom. Plate holders and cup shelves fold out of the way, and entire racks can be removed for washing extratall pasta pots and cookie sheets.

New dishwashers are also being made with noise levels and energy efficiency as top priorities. The quietest machines come in at only 40 decibels (dB); a human talking voice is about 60 dB. The best-performing models use fewer than 200 kilowatt hours (kWh) each year and less than two gallons of water per load. To qualify for Energy Star certification, dishwashers must perform 25 percent better than National Appliance Energy Conservation Act (NAECA) energy-efficiency standards—though with nearly 750 qualified machines on the market, the percent-better figure helps differentiate the barely better from the greatly green appliances.

So set those greasy pans aside as we review five standard-size machines that will have your household arguing about who gets to be on dish duty.

Today's dishwashers are quieter and more energy- and water-efficient than ever—giving you a little peace and quiet as well as peace of mind. The only thing they don't do is unload the dishes themselves.

Clean Plate Club



G 2832 SCi by Miele
Stainless steel interior with stainless steel or custom front panel option / 41 dB / 298 kWh per year / Averages 5 gallons water per load / 67% better than NAECA energy-efficiency standards / $2,249 / miele.com

Expert Opinion: I like this because it has a simple construction without any superfluous bells or whistles; it is easy to navigate. The rods that hold the plates are thicker and spaced farther apart than some machines but they allow more flexibility in how you arrange the dishes. I love the top tray for laying silverware down flat. I don't like when I have to put the forks and knives in sharp ends up (though they clean better that way), because I always worry about my clients reaching in later and hurting themselves.

What We Think: Its energy and water use are higher than most of the washers we tested, but this Miele features 11 wash programs so you can select the appropriate setting whether you just had appetizers with friends (reducing water usage to 1.2 gallons per load) or Thanksgiving dinner with the whole family. This is one of the few new machines where the control panel is still located on the front of the door rather than on its top edge, but with Miele, function trumps form.

Story by Miyoko Ohtake
Portrait by Aya Brackett



A Note on Our Expert:
Ginny Evans's childhood chore was to empty the dishwasher. These days, once she's loaded one up, her job—at least professionally—is done. Evans graduated from the Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Culinary Arts in New York City in early 2006 and opened a personal cooking and catering business in San Francisco later that year. Cooking in clients' homes, Evans has loaded her fair share and variety of dishwashers. "By the time you're loading the dishes, you've already shopped for the ingredients and prepped, cooked, and served the meal," she says. "You're at your least forgiving when you're at the dishwasher." Her washer must-haves: a simple, uncluttered design; a top tray for cutlery; and an audible click when you close the door. ▶



DF261-760 by Gaggenau
Stainless steel interior with stainless steel or custom front panel option / 41 dB / 180 kWh per year / Averages 2.6 gallons water per load / 159% better than NAECA energy-efficiency standards / $3,049 / gaggenau.com

Expert Opinion: This is very sleek, but it's also a very quiet piece, not too showy. It's beautifully put together; everything moves and rolls really easily. I like the angled third rack with the space for small bowls and silverware, in addition to the removable silverware basket. You can easily adjust the cup shelves for taller or shorter glasses, which is nice. The negative is the cost.

What We Think: Gaggenau, Bosch, and Thermador are all owned by BSH. Each brand's dishwashers are equipped with the same technology—triple filtration systems, flow-through water heaters, self-adjusting water sensors—but differ in design details and price tags. The Gaggenau's glyphic control panel requires a manual to understand, so asking a helpful dinner guest to start a load is out of the question.



SHX68E15UC by Bosch
Stainless steel interior with stainless steel or custom front panel option / 40 dB / 180 kWh per year / Averages 2 gallons water per load / 159% better than NAECA energy-efficiency standards / $2,099 / boschappliances.com

Expert Opinion: I'd absolutely choose this one: It's the quietest, uses very little energy and water, and has the angled top tray. I like that you can adjust the height of the middle rack or take it out completely; I can't stand when regular dinner plates don't fit on the bottom rack and this solves that problem. I'd lose the blue plastic on the racks, though.

What We Think: The adjustable middle rack is a feature that spans the three BSH brands but the ease with which it, and all other adjustable parts, can be moved declines from the Gaggenau to Bosch to Thermador models. The Bosch is the quietest washer currently on the market and is the most energy- and water-efficient in our roundup, meaning the most savings on your utility bills.



DWHD64E by Thermador
Stainless steel interior with stainless steel or custom front panel option / 45 dB / 290 kWh per year / 3.6–6.8 gallons water per load / 61% better than NAECA energy-efficiency standards / $1,399 / thermador.com

Expert Opinion: This washer doesn't have the top tray for cutlery, and the movable parts seem fragile. I think some people would prefer the raised buttons on the Thermador to the less tactile controls of some of the other machines—the same people who prefer the Blackberry to the iPhone—but I don't like them.

What We Think: Like most dishwashers today, the Thermador can be fully integrated into an existing kitchen design by adding custom panels, but unlike many models, its stainless steel option includes a choice between two handles, which is rare. While it performs well as a midrange dishwasher and is Energy Star–certified, it's only in the middle of the pack for energy and water efficiency and is one of the loudest machines in our roundup.



DD24DCTX6 by Fisher & Paykel
Carbon polymer interiors with stainless steel or custom front panel option / 41 dB (53 dB when both drawers are running) / 314 kWh per year / Averages 1.95 gallons water per load per drawer / 57% better than NAECA energy-efficiency standards / $1,199 / fisherpaykel.com

Expert Opinion: I like the idea of this dishwasher and want it to be the best, but it's not. Doing one drawer at a time or two different cycles simultaneously is a great idea, but the tubs get really gross inside if you don't regularly wash them, and suppliers report frequent needs to repair the parts.

What We Think: Dish drawers are a fantastic concept but the technology doesn't yet match the innovation. New models, like this one, hold plates up to 13 inches wide and have removable silverware baskets to allow for large pots and pans, but because the interiors are plastic, the maximum water temperature is lower than standard machines with stainless steel interiors, therefore it lacks a sanitize setting.

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MY LIFE

Poliform



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MY LIFE

Poliform





The Birds and The Beavers

At many construction sites, it's weather that causes the biggest delays. In Portland, Connecticut, where a group of Wesleyan University students were tasked with erecting an observation platform in a fallow cranberry bog, the antagonist was a most prodigious design-build outfit: a colony of beavers.

In January 2008, the Mattabeseck Audubon Society commissioned professor Elijah Huge's architecture studio class to design and build an observatory at its Helen Carlson Wildlife Sanctuary. The goal was to accommodate everyday birders as well as the society's elementary school outreach programs. Most importantly, though, the platform needed to protect the ecological integrity of the sanctuary, including the competing contractors across the pond—the beavers—who did everything in their power to keep the water level high, creating a bedraggled building site.

To tackle the project, Huge split his 13 students into teams that were then recombined and regrouped throughout the semester. The teams traded models and riffed on one another's work. The resulting design features a lower deck connected to an upper deck by a staircase that is hinged at the top and has rollers at the bottom to allow the structure to move seamlessly with the fluctuating water levels.

The Mattabeseck Audubon Society approved the design in mid-March 2008, and Huge and his students began a mad dash to complete as much off-site construction as possible. A crew at the sanctuary worked to lower the water level enough to install the foundation footings by breaking up the beaver dam in the sluiceway—a nearly Sisyphean effort, as the dam would often be completely rebuilt by the next day. Eventually the water level was low enough for the team to erect the six precast diamond-shaped piers. The area had already been neatly cleared by the beavers, but the minimal base allowed the students to save all but one tree. The other building components were floated out and pieced together on-site.

The finished observatory is located off one of the artificial berms formerly used for cranberry cultivation, employing the landmass as a natural access point from the periphery of the wetlands. The decks capitalize on views at both the water and the canopy lines, and the transparency of the resin grating underfoot allows sunlight to pass through the structure, encouraging the growth of flora and fauna below.

The observatory, which the students dubbed SplitFrame, has since endured its first New England winter and is holding up well. If the number of folding chairs set up along the upper-level deck is any indication, it is being put to good use by birders and their ilk. It is a place to experience wildlife without disrupting it. The birds go about their daily habits unmolested, and the beavers, too, are now happily minding their own dam business.

Photos courtesy North Studio

Story by Amber Bravo

"The students were really ambitious," Elijah Huge says. "This class was just one step beyond the intro studio, but they were really dedicated to making this project happen."



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The New American Home

Macallen Building
Architect: Office dA
Location: Boston, Massachusetts

Driving north on Dorchester Avenue, one glimpses the curious hillock of a building that rises high toward the west-lying Boston skyline and shrugs, deferentially, toward South Boston to the east. The traditionally working-class Irish neighborhood has steadily gentrified over the last decade, but despite this, the Macallen Building evokes something of the grassy headlands of the old world while still setting a standard for future development in Boston as the city's first LEED Gold–certified residential structure.

Office dA's architects worked with structural engineers and contractors early in the design process to maximize the building's potential given its unique location and parameters. The resulting 140-unit condominium complex is made up of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units, cleverly organized on a staggered truss system, which allows for high ceilings and "columnless" floor space. This also makes for a more varied layout from unit to unit and floor to floor. In order to make this system cost-effective, the team employed what Office dA principals Nader Tehrani and Monica Ponce de Leon term the "shish kebab" effect, which essentially entails stacking all the plumbing and mechanical along one vertical column, with the units staggered off of that central core.

An energy recovery system cycles fresh air into the residential units (20 of which are low-income, exceeding the city's required 10 percent) as well as the four commercial units in the front of the building and four artist's lofts above the storefronts. Landworks Studio, frequent Office dA collaborators, designed all the landscape elements of the building, including the hardscape concrete pavers that visually link the Macallen Building with the building next door. Owned by the same developer, the buildings share a gym, lap pool, and four-story parking garage. The Macallen houses the latter, which boasts an impressive garden terrace, whose six-foot grassy mounds can accommodate shade trees. The wood hardscaping cuts diagonally across the green space, culminating in a large circular drum sheathed in wood slatting that houses all of the



Photos by John Horner

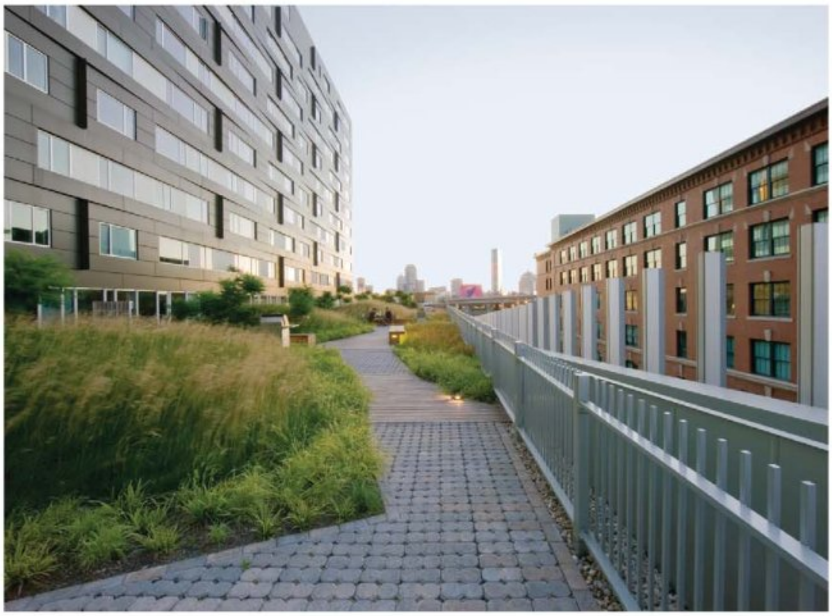


building's mechanical and electric components. This allows for a hoodless roofscape planted in varietals of sedum. All of the greenscaping is irrigated by the building's extensive rainwater management system, which collects all the runoff in a series of below-grade cisterns.

In many ways, the Macallen Building achieved its Gold rating through a series of intuitive, low-tech methods of building sustainably, starting foremost with its close proximity to Boston's commuter rail. As Tehrani attests, there is nothing technologically superlative about the Macallen Building's sustainable elements. "It is the lowest common denominator to which architects should aspire today," he explains. "At a technological level, this is really a meat-and-potatoes building." Maybe so, but for the residents of South Boston, meat and potatoes have always served as nourishment.

—Amber Bravo





Habitat at RiversEdge
Architect: Hays + Ewing Design Studio
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

Proving that modern architecture can have a conscience as clean as its design, nearly everything for the two Habitat at RiversEdge houses—from materials to labor—was donated: Plans were tweaked to accommodate contributions of building materials, and construction was modified to be volunteer-friendly. Working directly with Habitat for Humanity and the Rivanna Collaborative in Charlottesville, Virginia, Hays + Ewing Design Studio created the modern, sustainable living spaces on a ten-unit urban infill lot, unifying courtyards and optimizing shared outdoor spaces to "get away from that structure of suburban 'plop plop plop' developments," says principal Allison Ewing.
—Jordan Kushins







The Envelope
Architect: Buchanan Architecture
Location: Dallas, Texas

Fifteen years ago, the Oak Lawn neighborhood of Dallas, Texas, was filled with dilapidated, derelict houses. Then the city introduced zoning laws aimed to oust squatters and foster community by requiring all new construction to be multiresidential.

The new codes, which require specific height and setbacks; set balcony and awning depths; and two parking spaces per unit, shaped the design of the Envelope, a three-unit condominium designed by local architect Russell Buchanan. "The zoning restrictions created this invisible envelope around the site," he says. "We were pushing at it, kissing its inner edge, to fit this building in."

Though each 1,700-square-foot unit has its own fenced-in garden outside its front door, the driveway area in the back, under the cantilevered second floor, has offered the biggest appeal. Whether to watch a rainstorm or cook up a Sunday barbecue, the private drive has become the condos' communal hot spot, and the development has helped bring the lush life to Oak Lawn.
—Miyoko Ohtake

Photos by Philip Beaurline (Habitat), Jason Franzen (The Envelope)


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Chicon

Architect: Studio 512
Location: Austin, Texas

Of all the American cities that sing their own praises about quality of life, affordability, and climate, Austin, Texas, may be the only one for which the three-part pitch strikes a resonant frequency. While the cost of living can hardly be capped in such a desirable city, members of the community are committed to keeping neighborhoods intact, keeping development at bay, and of course, "keeping Austin weird."

Architect Nicole Blair, an Austin native, is among this faction of loyal locals. The first commision for Blair's young firm, Studio 512, was a commission to build a duplex in the east Austin neighborhood of Blackshear. Blair set out to design a modern building that would fit in with the existing homes while also reflecting the burgeoning arts scene.

The Chicon duplex is appropriately vibrant, clad in Hardie-board siding painted three shades of yellow. Asymmetrical horizontal windows add further artistry to the design and allow plenty of daylight inside. In order to keep the scale of the duplex proportional with neighboring houses, Blair oriented one unit behind the other for a slim streetside profile.

Perhaps the most significant planning parameter was the budget: $250,000 for the entire project, encompassing both two-bedroom units—one 1,450 square feet and the other 1,550 square feet—and a 250-square-foot shared porch. In order to meet this requirement, Blair used shed roofs and simple structural forms to reduce construction costs and materials. She also considered affordability for future tenants with low-maintenance, hard-wearing surfaces and plenty of built-ins to save on the cost of furnishing the units.

The building hosts a diverse collection of tenants, from groups of twenty-somethings to older couples. As a composition that aims to balance the original tenor of the neighborhood with new voices from the Austin arts scene, the Chicon duplex has found an easy harmony.

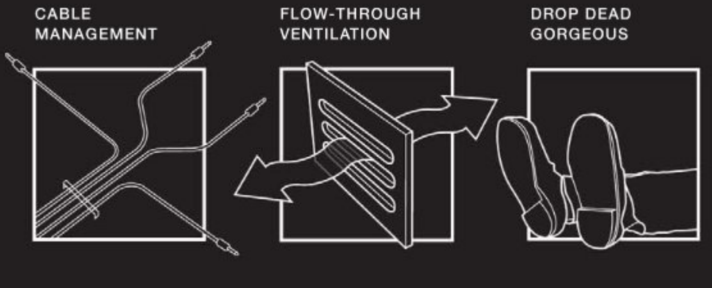
—Sarah Rich





Photos by Patrick Y. Wong/Atelier Wong Photography





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Tempe Urban Living
Architect: Baldinger Studio
Location: Tempe, Arizona

Located fewer than ten miles from downtown Phoenix in the city of Tempe, Arizona, the Tempe Urban Living condominium by Baldinger Studio is a private retreat in the middle of an urban center. Though the 15 units, which range from 1,100 to 2,750 square feet, boast two stories of spacious, minimal design, the real draw is the connection to the greater community. "People like living close to where they work and play," architect Ilan Baldinger says. "But land and resources are scarce, so the future is in building more densely."

The condos are a walk away from the restaurants and businesses that line Mill Avenue (Tempe's main drag), the performing arts center, a public swimming pool and community center, and the light rail, which takes passengers through downtown Tempe and Arizona State University to downtown Phoenix. And at the end of a busy day, the Tempe Urban Living residents can quietly take in the bustling action of the city from their individual rooftop terraces.

—Miyoko Ohtake



Park Modern
Architect: Build LLC
Location: Seattle, Washington

Park Modern has emerged in Seattle's University District as a contemporary microcosm of city living. Kevin Eckert, principal at architecture firm Build LLC (and Park Modern resident), designed the place with community in mind. Twelve residential units—ranging from 800 to 1,900 square feet—run front-to-back like individual row houses, with large, semiprivate shared terraces in the rear and the Herkimer Coffee shop on the ground floor providing ideal places for spending time with the neighbors. Build LLC's offices and Ten Pachi salon fill out the two additional commercial lots on the property. With most amenities within walking distance, Park Modern makes an attractive locale for a commute-free lifestyle.

—Jordan Kushins

Photos by Raul J. Garcia (Tempe Urban Living), Andrew van Leeuwen (Park Modern)



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Formosa 1140

Architect: Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects
Location: Los Angeles, California

It takes a special brand of crazy to design and develop multiunit speculative housing for pseudosuburban Los Angeles—one proudly possessed by the paradigm-shifting duo of architect Lorcan O'Herlihy and Richard Loring, director of the Habitat Group Los Angeles. With two sold-out successes under their belts (including Habitat 825, the new lime-green landmark next door to the iconic Schindler House), the team recently completed a third project, furthering their mission to get Angelenos to think a little more densely. The four-story, 11-unit Formosa 1140, dressed in bright reds sampled from nearby Formosa Cafe, engages both its residents and West Hollywood neighbors: Almost a third of the 4,600-square-foot lot is a Katherine Spitz–designed space that's leased back to the city as a public park—a truly bold move for a place where the status quo dictates that neighborly relations, if any, be conducted in a rectangular courtyard pool at the center of a stucco box. "We wanted to do something that's socially relevant and still be provocative," says O'Herlihy. "I think you can do both."

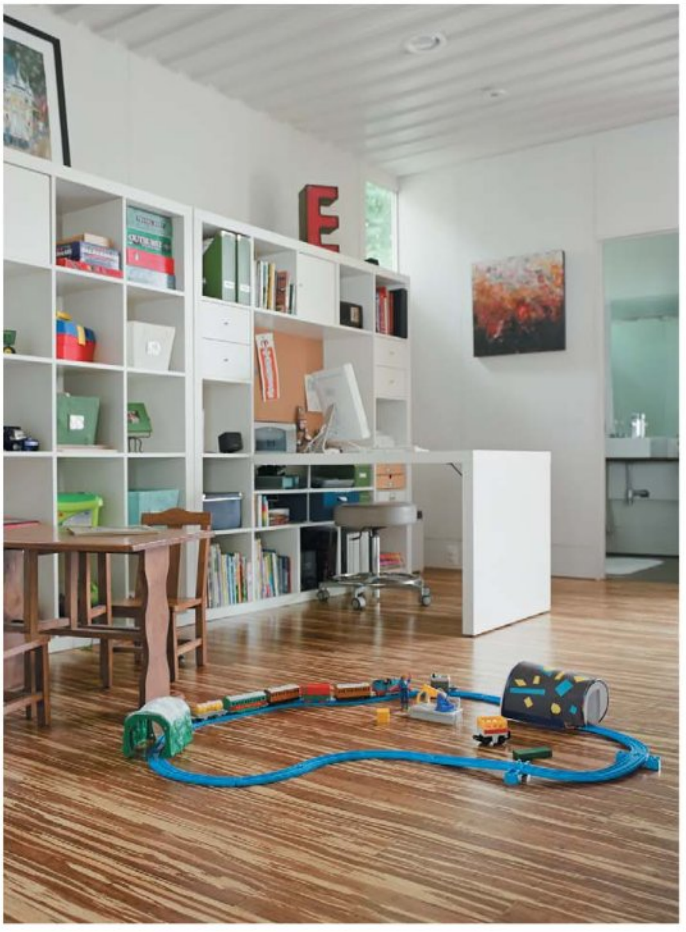
O'Herlihy brought the same energy to Formosa 1140's 11 lofts, which average about 1,500 square feet each for a two-bedroom. Each airy, double-height unit fronts the park, but O'Herlihy carves away at the conventional cube with surprisingly placed windows and decks that punch into the units, showering the rooms with light. The push-and-pull is echoed by a skin of steel with panels arranged in a peekaboo pattern that plays with the concept of privacy. This corrugated exoskeleton around the dark-stained cedar of the exterior acts as not only a decorative sun shade but a place to tuck the staircases and walkways that allow residents to circulate in movements carefully choreographed to optimize interaction. "Our buildings tend to be more social than most," says Loring, noting that the radical architecture itself acts as a lightning rod, attracting a particular type of progressive buyer. "The design gives the residents a common ground," he says. "It's a little like a dorm."

—Alissa Walker



Photo by Lawrence Anderson


1140





The Shipping Muse



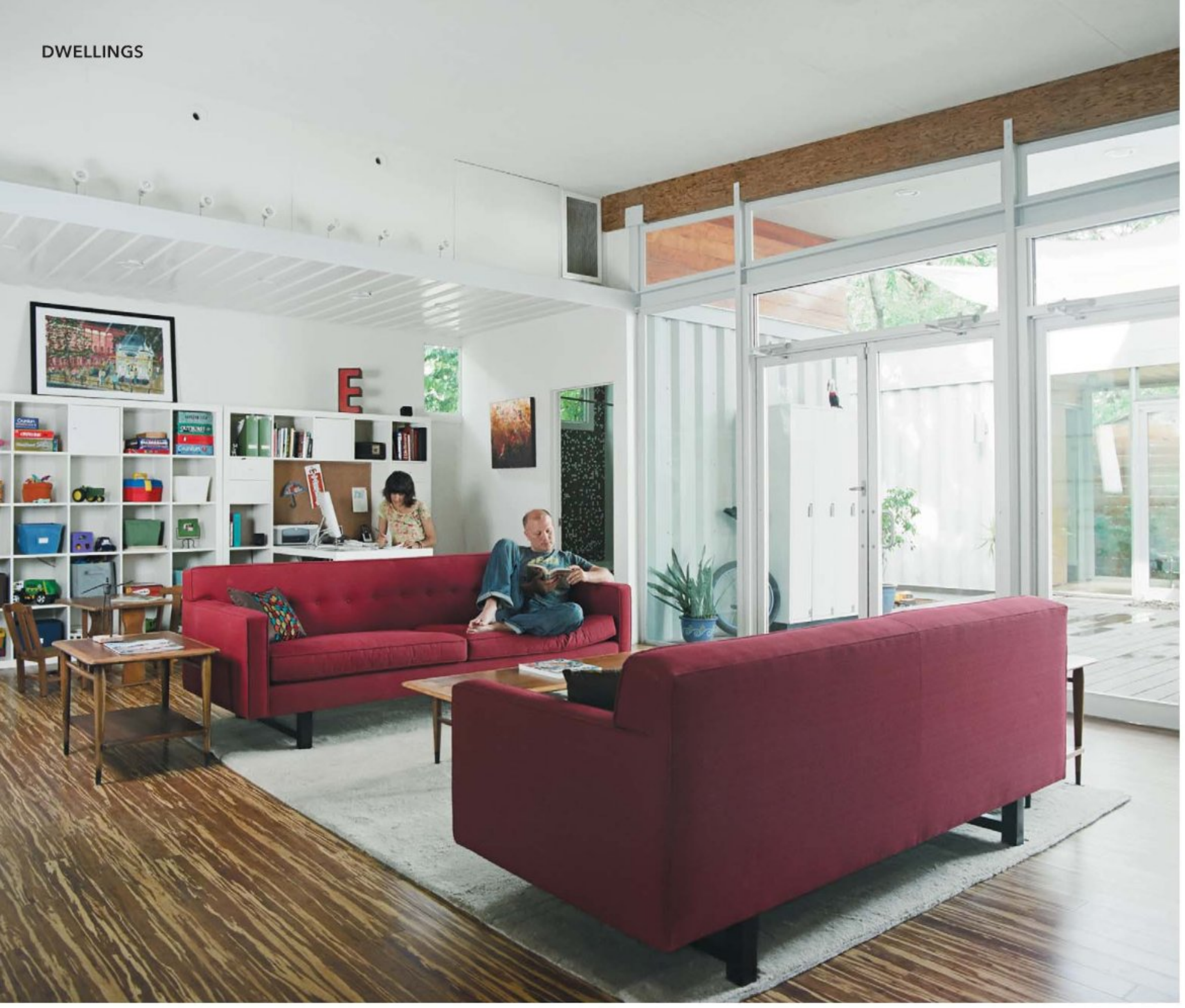
Story by Miyoko Ohtake
Photos by Jack Thompson

Project: Freeman-Feldmann House
Designer: Christopher Robertson, Robertson Design
Location: Houston, Texas



SHIPPING CONTAINERS ARE UBIQUITOUS IN HOUSTON, THOUGH UNLIKE THE FOUR THAT MAKE UP THIS NEW HOME, THEY'RE USUALLY FILLED WITH FOREIGN GOODS RATHER THAN FLOURISHING LIVES.

One of the main draws of Kevin Freeman and Jen Feldmann's house is its connection to the neighborhood, which is why the front porch was a must. "Homes that have a door but no outside space say, 'I'm not interested in you,'" designer Christopher Robertson explains. "This says, 'I'm here to be part of the community.'"



The open-plan living spaces act like a "giant kitchen" that invites guests to mingle throughout the house. In the kitchen proper (opposite top), Freeman fixes a snack while son Eli plays on the counter, one of his favorite spots in the house, second only to the kitchen steps. The vertical window next to the tucked-away washer and dryer (opposite bottom left) provides natural light as well as easy access to the compost bin outside.

Downtown Houston, Texas, feels like a ghost town. Buildings with tinted windows loom heavily and cast dark shadows on the abandoned sidewalks. Residents rarely spend time here, and when they do, you would hardly know it: 6.3 miles of tunnels connect more than 80 city buildings, pushing pedestrians underground and away from the heat, the humidity, and the possibility of a dynamic urban lifestyle.

Though the city lacks visible signs of human interaction, Houston is industrially and economically one of the busiest places in America. Its refineries produce up to 1.5 million barrels of oil each day, and its port handles the most foreign cargo—and second-most total tonnage—in the United States. Each year, more than 225 million tons of cargo pass through the 25-mile-long port, including 1.6 million shipping containers—or 1.6 million potential building blocks, in the eyes of Houston developers Katie Nichols and John Walker.

Nichols and Walker met in 2004 at Burning Man, a weeklong art bacchanalia in the Nevada desert, and forged a friendship over like-minded design dreams: "We both wanted to create affordable, design-intensive housing for creative, urban people," Nichols says. In 2006, they founded Numen Development to do just that with affordable, easily acquired, incredibly durable shipping containers.

Though containers are part of Houston's vernacular, Nichols and Walker knew the idea of living in one was not. Thus, their first order of business was to build a prototype home. In a transitional neighborhood two miles north of downtown Houston, they found a pair of available lots, empty save an abandoned speedboat rusting on the lawn. The properties were across the street from a meat distributor, which could have meant an uphill battle for winning over potential residents, but the location also provided access to Houston Heights, a hip part of



town where neighbors chat over espresso at coffee shops and hang out with their kids in nearby parks.

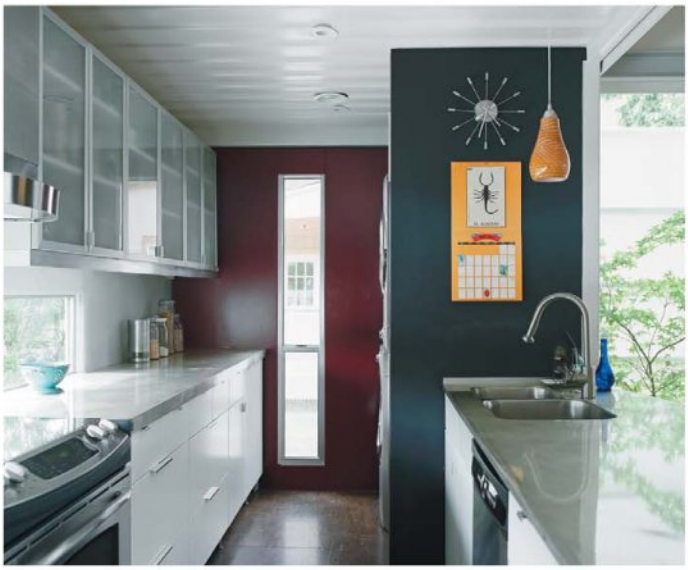
Nichols and Walker signed the property deed and enlisted Christopher Robertson as the designer. Robertson's previous work included art galleries, darkrooms, and private homes, but never anything with containers. "I've always liked them for their texture and durability," Robertson says. "The challenge was to build a legitimately sellable container house by making it feel like a typical home."

Despite its unconventional elements, Robertson was able to create a traditional rectangular plan. Outside, the corrugated steel of three containers—two 40-foot-long modules and one 20-foot-long unit—form the northern, southern, and western facades, with a glass wall to the east completing the perimeter of the 1,538-square-foot home. Inside, the containers act as "really wide walls" into which Robertson inserted the private and utility areas. The master suite fills the southern container; the second bedroom and bathroom, plus an opening for the office and playroom, take up the northern one; and the kitchen and laundry rooms inhabit the 20-foot unit parallel to the street. In the middle, the dining room flows into the living, office, and play spaces then out the glass doors to the 400-square-foot deck that connects the home to a 40-foot-long container that houses the guest quarters and storage shed.

With the plans completed and the building permit in hand, Nichols and Walker were ready to lay the foundation of the home and cement their status as a container construction company when, two weeks before they were scheduled to break ground, their investor pulled out. Desperate, Nichols emailed everyone she knew looking for a new financial backer. She received a reply asking for details not only about investing but also about moving in.

The bailout message came from the "F-man(n)s"—Kevin Freeman and Jen Feldmann, whom Nichols ▶

"THE CHALLENGE WAS TO BUILD A LEGITIMATELY SELLABLE CONTAINER HOUSE BY MAKING IT FEEL LIKE A TYPICAL HOME."





Robertson opened up the master suite with a light wall that is amber on the dining-room side, pale turquoise in the bedroom, and glowing green when the lights between the fiberglass sheets are illuminated. He also wanted the family to feel the constraints of the containers, so he emphasized the bedroom ceilings (opposite). "You almost feel like a hobo on a train," Feldmann says, romanticizing about her view from bed.





befriended in 2003. Freeman and Feldmann had met at Indiana University, when he was studying to become a dentist; she, a doctor. The dental and medical schools shared an anatomy lab, and Freeman and Feldmann shared a tendency for running late—which left them working at adjacent tables. "We fell in love over cadavers," Freeman jokes.

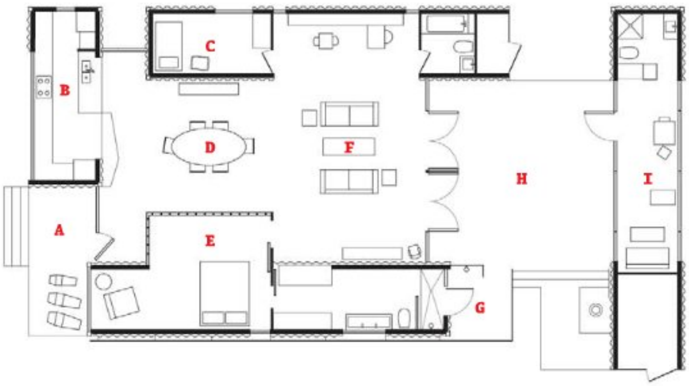
The couple moved to Houston in 1997 for Feldmann's residency, and, like so many of the city's residents, their intended temporary status soon became permanent. "Houston's not full of obvious natural beauty," Freeman says, "but it has a lot of hidden charms," like the close-knit art and music communities. When Nichols's email arrived in Feldmann's inbox, the couple and their then-one-year-old son, Eli, were living in a neighborhood too far away from friends and venues to meet up for a last-minute dinner or catch a show. "Where we were living, there was nothing to do that was within walking or biking distance," Freeman says. "You couldn't even bike to breakfast!" Feldmann exclaims.

Nichols's plea for help led the couple to the solution they were looking for. Freeman and Feldmann took out a construction loan in the fall of 2007 and were moved in by April 2008. Although they traded a house with seven closets and a two-car garage for one with just two closets and no garage, they were happy to finance their friends' dream and have access to a vibrant neighborhood.

Now Freeman and Feldmann walk to the doughnut and snow-cone shops down the street and rave about the breakfast-burrito joint around the corner. They ride their bikes, which total nine (including a tandem), to meet friends and take Eli and their two dogs, Arnold and Ruti, to play at the numerous parks that dot the area. The meat distributor begins loading trucks as early as 5:30 a.m., but the couple imagines themselves as hipsters living in New York City's meatpacking district, and that makes it okay. ▶

"WE FURNISHED THE HOUSE, AND I THOUGHT, 'OH, NO! OUR FRIDGE ISN'T MAGNETIC.' THEN I REALIZED THE WHOLE HOUSE IS MAGNETIC."





Freeman-Feldmann House Floor Plan

A Entry
B Kitchen
C Bedroom
D Dining Area
E Master Bedroom
F Living/Play Area
G Outdoor Shower
H Deck
I Guest Room

The deck between the main house and guest quarters catches a cool breeze—a big bonus during Houston's "super-summers"—and is often filled with friends enjoying microbrews. Alongside the redwood shade screen (opposite), which keeps the house from overheating, Freeman and Feldmann grow vegetables in an 18-inch-wide garden but frequently bike to nearby eateries for the local Mexican cuisine.

Though people sometimes stop to look at the house, the clever use of containers often goes unnoticed. Feldmann, however, loves pushing aside the landscaping to reveal the integrity of the structures. She also takes full advantage of their metallic qualities: "When we were furnishing the house, I thought, 'Oh, no! Our fridge isn't magnetic for Eli's artwork,' but then I realized the whole house is magnetic," Feldmann says. "We've become magnet connoisseurs," Freeman adds. Perhaps the greatest reminders of the home's origins are the messages written throughout the house in magnetic letters.

The couple has thought about one day adding on a container for when Eli gets older or they have another child. But what they really have their hearts set on is acquiring the land across the street—which the meat distributor has hinted at putting on the market—and building condominiums and an attached restaurant, all made from containers.

Even if neither of those dreams comes to fruition, there will be more containers on the block: Nichols and Walker are both building their own homes on the lot adjacent to Freeman and Feldmann's. Nichols's is a single raised 45-foot container, and Walker's is an integrated three-container design much like the couple's.

The future of container construction, however, is still unclear. These architectural building blocks are readily available and relatively inexpensive: Containers can be purchased for anywhere from $2,000 for a weathered model to $5,500 for a lightly used one. But in Houston, as elsewhere, the biggest challenge lies in the building codes, which help maintain the status quo by resisting radical change. As more designers push container architecture from fad to legitimate building system, it's possible that one day they will be seen not only as units for shipping but also as containers for living.







WITH NEARLY HALF A CENTURY OF ARCHITECTURAL EXPERIENCE, PETER COHEN DESIGNED THIS INGENIOUS SPINE-AND-MODULE HOME FOR HIM AND HIS WIFE SALLY IN THE COASTAL FORESTS JUST OUTSIDE ELLSWORTH, MAINE.

The Right Track

Story by Aaron Britt
Photos by Mark Mahaney

Project: Maison Amtrak
Architect: Peter M. Cohen & Associates
Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Peter Cohen is 84 years old, lives in the sticks— a couple of miles outside Ellsworth, Maine—and likes to write letters. Don't get me wrong: This self-described *ancien* is no Luddite. He's a friend of email and progressive politics, and his green Prius sports an "Octogenarians for Obama" sticker. But the métier in which I've found him to be at his best (discounting architecture, where he's designed a handful of smart, inexpensive, and structurally innovative houses over the last half century) involves letterhead, a return-address stamp, and that increasingly rare commodity, a typewriter ribbon.

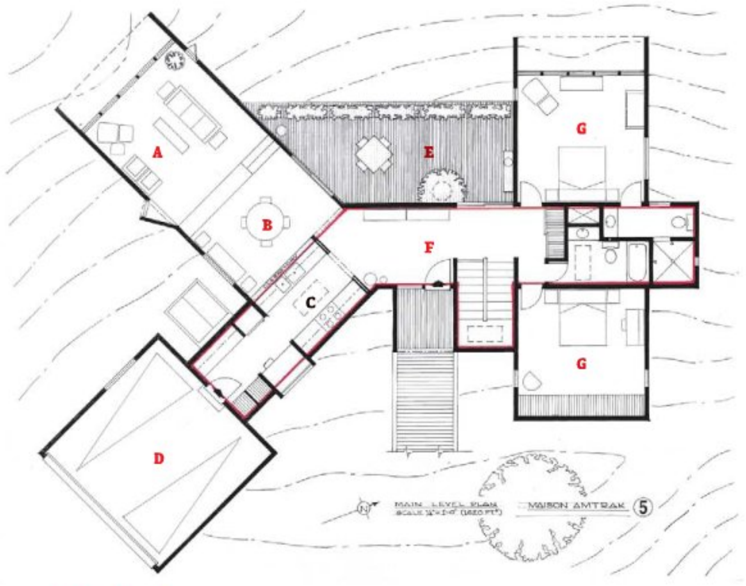
His classy, bespoke envelopes, with "Peter M. Cohen & Associates, Architect" running vertically down the left-hand side; the typewritten perfection of his missives; and his geometric, all-caps handwriting all plainly say, "This man is an architect of the old school." One who studied with Josep Lluís Sert at Harvard in the 1950s, who helped Louis Kahn choose the furniture for Kahn's First Unitarian Church in Rochester, New York, and who is, by his lights anyway, "the only living American architect to shake Le Corbusier's hand. Twice." But beyond the graphics, textured paper, and architect's letterhead you'll find a man who wants to communicate.

Cohen has written me somewhat regularly since I visited his home last summer, usually with an additional detail about his house or a list of materials he used but just as often to inquire after my well-being and to comment on the state of local and national affairs.

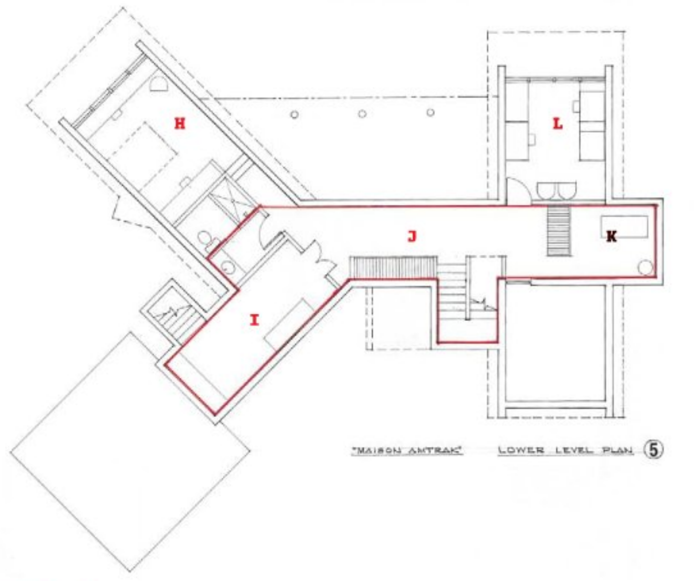
If every architect could communicate with half the wit, warmth, and clarity typical of a Cohen dispatch, there'd be little room for the Derridean deconstructivists and half-baked Tschumiites who lard the halls of more than a few American design schools. A letter from last month opens like this: "Dear Aaron, Despite our nation shuddering at the word 'derivatives' I have found among the ▸



The entryway to Maison Amtrak (opposite) owes a debt to Japanese architecture, a touchstone of Peter Cohen's career. Below, Cohen and his wife, Sally, sit in the dining room, which along with the connected living room, is a focal point of the house, lighted in part by high, remote-controlled clerestory windows.



Main Level



Lower Level

dozen houses I have designed that five are indeed derivatives of a spine-and-module system started 48 years ago. None, to the best of my knowledge, have proven toxic."

The same goes for the home that he shares with his wife, Sally; their Abyssinian, Rosie; and their golden retriever, Daisy. The Cohens moved to Maine in 1985 after Peter retired from teaching architecture at Cornell University, first taking up residence in the filled-out bones of an antebellum barn brought along from Ithaca. Their new house, the wryly dubbed Maison Amtrak—"it has a marked resemblance to the usual newspaper photos of a typical derailment," he quips—sits just up a wooded slope from the Union River. It's the latest in a series of the five houses that make use of Cohen's own spine-and-module design system. With a central corridor comprising the kitchen, service areas, hallway, main entrance, and mechanical components, Cohen is free to clip modules such as bedrooms, offices, living rooms, or decks onto the frame. He has attached them strategically to take advantage of surrounding views and topography. Originally implemented on a house he designed in 1961, the system is still a pliant and viable strategy for homes of all sizes. Cohen says that the plan "works well with irregular, sloping sites with views and woods, rather than the typical rectangular plot of a quarter acre or less."

Little surprise, then, that a low, rectangular window best glimpsed while lying in Cohen's own bed (he encouraged me to test it out) should have one of the best views in the house, straight through the pines to the river below. Sally's bedroom, the same size as Cohen's at 16 by 16 feet, is just across the hall, a concession not to a deteriorating marriage but to Cohen's confession to being "an active sleeper." The final two modules of the top floor consist of the garage and dining and living ▶

Maison Amtrak Floor Plans

A Living Area
B Dining Area
C Kitchen
D Garage
E Deck
F Entry
G Bedroom
H Office/Guest Room
I Workshop
J Lower Gallery
K Mechanical
L Office







In addition to writing many letters, Cohen also does a fair bit of sketching by hand. The plans for the house (opposite top) are products of his love to draw. His bedroom (opposite below) is clipped onto one end of the house, just across from Sally's bedroom. A door to the left of the bed leads into his spacious bathroom, where he cleans up after long, muddy hikes in the woods with his golden retriever, Daisy.

Classic mid-century furniture like the Eames lounge chair in Cohen's bedroom (below) populate the home, a nod to his long life in architecture. Viewed from a good distance down the slope running to the Union River, the Maison Amtrak (above) is clearly oriented toward the river. The deck is sheltered from the neighbors' view by Cohen's bedroom to the right and the living room at left.





room, which measures 16 by 28 feet. The former is home to the aforementioned Prius and the latter to an arresting view of the Union and a lifetime's accumulation of design know-how.

A visiting architect might marvel at the huge window looking out into the trees and the cleverly placed air duct that keeps it from fogging up in subzero winters; then at the operable window placed unobtrusively in the sidewall to allow the ventilation that the fixed-casement glass doesn't; and finally at the custom bookshelf, aged to a rich brown and meant to house a proper design library and conceal "the maw of a television." But chez Cohen, subtlety trumps wild flourish, which means that those weary from an hour's tour, like my wife, will likely miss the home's deft details as they head straight for the sun-drenched Eero Saarinen–designed Womb chair Cohen has prized for decades. "It was through Sert that we got that chair. I was just about to graduate from the Graduate School of Design, and [Walter] Gropius had just left, so Sert, then the dean, got all his students the architects' rate," he says. Then, the bargain still not lost, he adds, "Forty percent off!"

As we sit in the living room, Cohen describes how his house, a dream in the summer, is just as efficient in the winter: "Snow, after a sunny winter day, will slide off avalanche style from the pitched roofs, and rain is heard as a pleasant, soft patter." Structural insulated panels (SIPs) that make up the walls and roof keep the Cohens warm, the house green, and the costs of both construction and heating down. SIPs also offer the stability and strength to cope with the average Maine snowfall. Just as I was longing for winter so I could curl up with a book, snugly ensconced in the house during a nor'easter, Cohen and I stepped out onto his deck, the most sensible place to pass a summer in Maine.

Made of pressure-treated Douglas fir two-by-fours turned on their ends and spaced with plywood blocks, the deck separates the dining room and living room module from the master bedroom module and is simply grand when the weather's fine. "The boards have grayed out, and rain or spilled drinks fall through the slats to the ground below," Cohen says, adding, "Spike heels are unseen in Maine." To prevent a perilous drop off the edge of the deck, geraniums planted in steel cylinders cut lengthwise and mounted on wooden supports create a blazing barrier without obstructing the view down to the river. Though much of Maison Amtrak's appeal is in its clever engineering, Cohen's aesthetic sense is equally developed, and it was on those grounds ▸



One of the coziest nooks in the house is in the living room, a window seat where Cohen sits and reads (opposite left). Because the large glass window in the living room is fixed, the smaller one opens to allow cross breezes and ventilation. Sally (opposite right) waters the row of geraniums, keeping the bright red security barrier marking the edge of the deck in full bloom.

A pair of LC2 chairs (above) by Le Corbusier are ideal spots for watching the river down below. The Womb chair by Eero Saarinen is a close second. The central spine of the house jogs left to include the kitchen (right), which eventually leads out to the garage. Cohen tried to keep the garage relatively small, claiming many Americans give their cars the best spot in the house.





The bottom floor of Maison Amtrak hosts Cohen's office (above), a guest room that doubles as Sally's office, the mechanical systems, and storage space. Though the bottom floor is set below grade, windows look out just a few feet above the ground, allowing lots of light in. Cohen was once a pilot and his office houses the ephemera (right) of decades spent flying around New York and New England.

A series of long stairs (opposite right) leads to Maison Amtrak, which is set below street level. The entranceway demonstrates Cohen's love of Japanese design with a geometric simplicity matched only by the formal elegance of the stained Douglas fir two-by-fours.



that he was loath to add a railing to the deck. He made the case for his planters to a building inspector, who conceded that stringing up a tennis net in addition to the geraniums would suffice.

Downstairs, Cohen's office, much of it below grade, is kitted out with the ephemera of his other passion: piloting small planes. The room gets wonderful light through a bank of river-facing windows, as does Sally's office down the hall, which doubles as a guest room. The exposed concrete walls keep things cool in the summer and warm in the winter, though a botched job on the initial pour led Cohen to clad the walls in Homasote—a structural fiberboard produced in New Jersey—and cover them with an impressive collection of posters. Cohen credits a trio of local craftsmen, George Daley, Crosby Noyes, and Peter Whittlesey, with correcting some initial mistakes in the construction and bringing Maison Amtrak up to par.

It's impressive that a then-seventy-something architect, who might otherwise have retired to the warmer climes of, say, Florida, brought off the place at all, but to do the whole project for $300,000 including the riverfront land is something of a coup. Resale value wasn't on Cohen's mind—"This is a house for the last part of our lives," he says—but making the most of what he had to work with was. Along with the SIPs, the use of local wood, local builders, and a host of off-the-shelf options like storage cabinet kits from Home Depot account for a savings in both energy and materials. Cohen sought "a house built of good-quality materials without faux details and ornate fittings."

Living pretty close to the middle of nowhere also helped keep costs in check, though one of Cohen's smartest moves was making use of the spine-and-module system. By putting all the mechanical elements in a central core, as opposed to noodling throughout the house, he managed to save space, money, and energy and organize the home to best suit its tricky site. The system also calls to mind the work of Cohen's mid-century idols like Buckminster Fuller and Kisho Kurokawa, who aimed for a malleable, vibrant, surprising architecture based on modules attached to a central core.

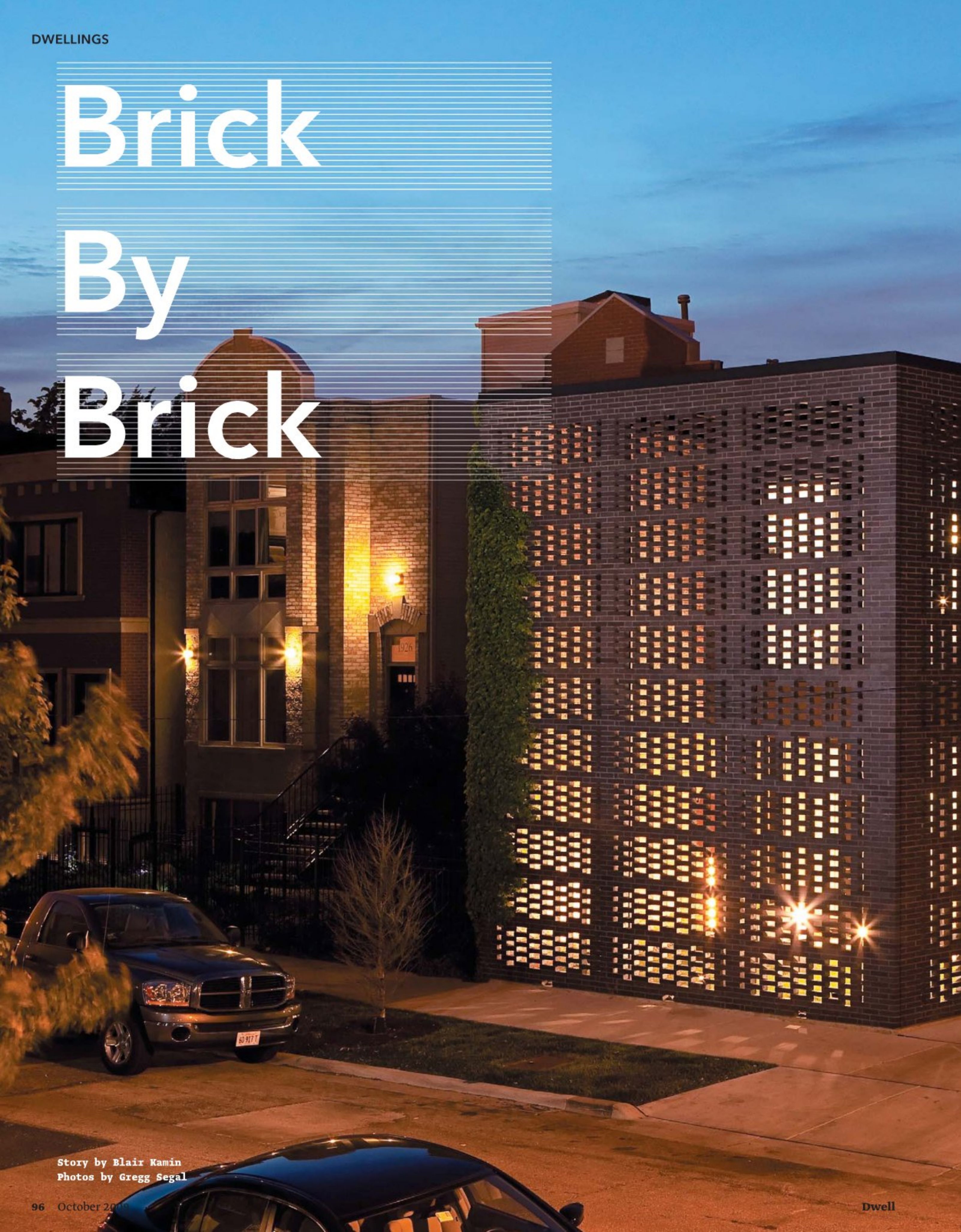
It's the rugged Maine landscape that Cohen treasures most, though, and he has designed his home to best engage it. Beyond simply capturing the views and making the most of the pines, Cohen's design is also essentially interested in the needs of people living in the landscape. One of his letters describes the five-by-five-foot shower that he has come to relish "after showering for 15 years in a space that approximated a London telephone stall." He often shares the larger space with Daisy after their "mud-splattered hikes" in the woods.

Though his notes now allude to the challenges of "acting my age," he and Sally carry on, finding no small joy in their home, their surroundings, and their new president. The letters will continue, I hope, perhaps turning from his house to other aspects of his life and career. I hope he'll write to tell me more about his experience working with Kahn, his time building a hospital in Kabul in the 1970s, or his days flying around the Northeast. Architecture and his life as an architect are rarely far from Cohen's mind, though. One of his most recent letters ends on an introspective, optimistic note, an apt sign-off from perhaps the state of Maine's only remaining mid-century modernist.

"I wonder why I persevered and built another spine-and-module residence for myself," he writes. "But we are most comfortable and satisfied with the result after nine years. There is minimal maintenance and we are managing as independent *anciens*."



Brick By Brick

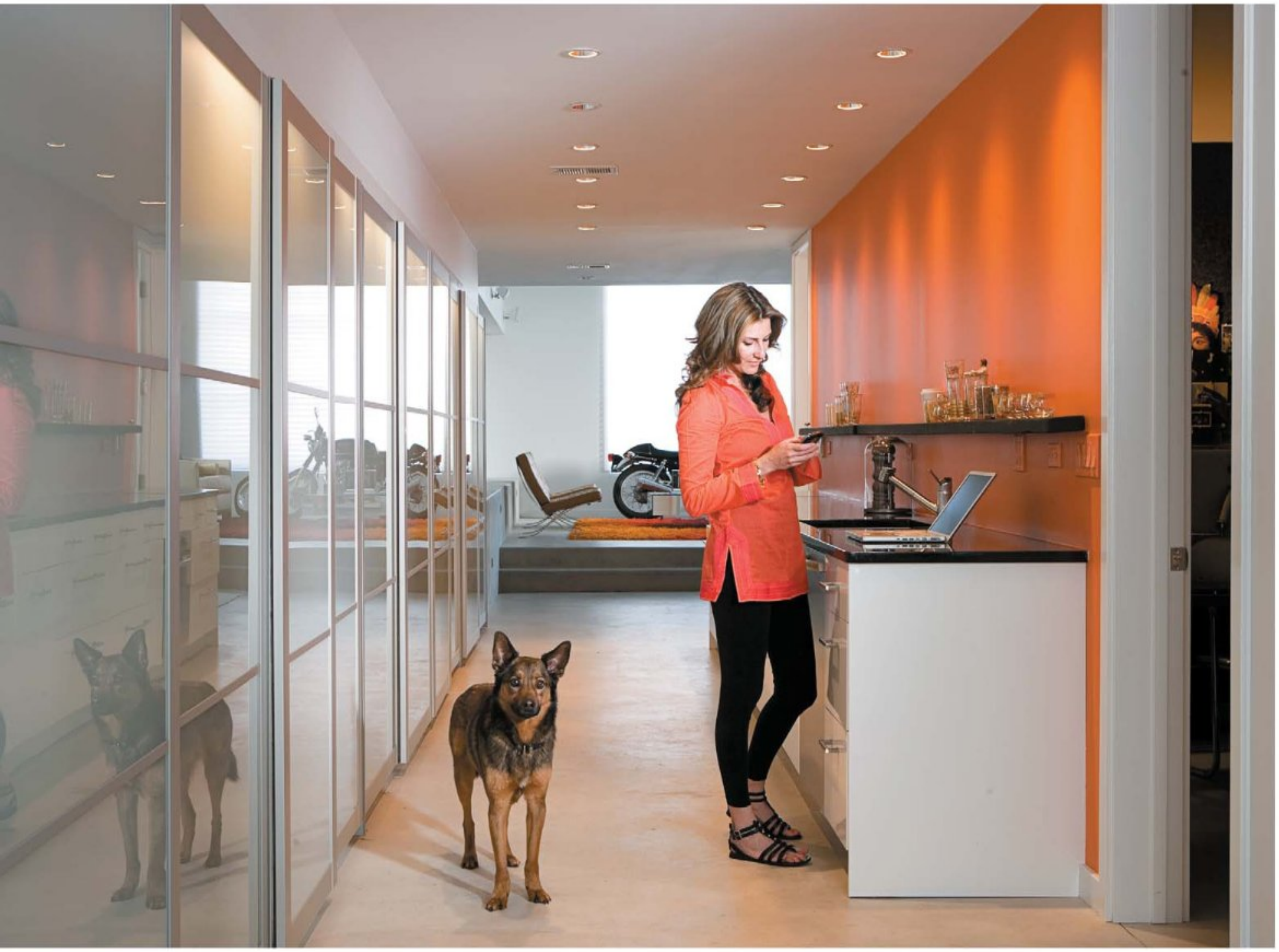


Story by Blair Kamin
Photos by Gregg Segal



BORN AS A HORSE STABLE, THE BRICK WEAVE HOUSE IN CHICAGO IS ALL ABOUT TRANSPORTATION AND TRANSPARENCY. A CLEVER RENOVATION HAS MADE IT THE MOST COMPELLING ARCHITECTURE ON THE BLOCK AND HOME TO A PAIR OF URBANITE GEARHEADS AND THEIR BEVY OF CARS AND MOTORCYCLES.

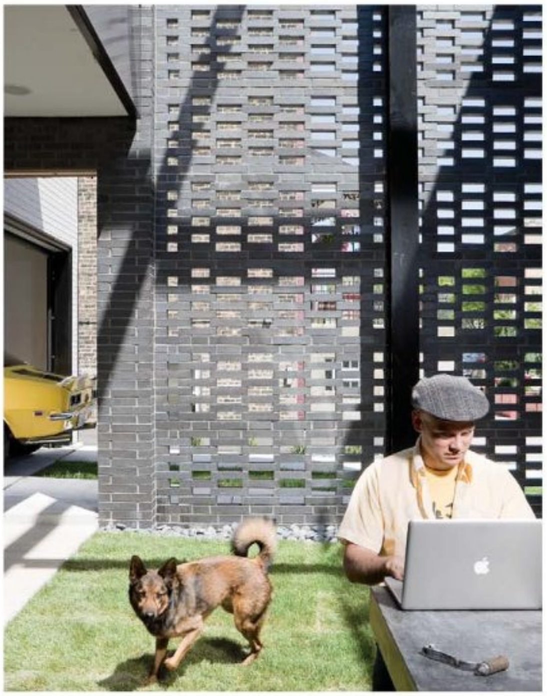
Project: The Brick Weave House
Architect: Studio Gang Architects
Location: Chicago, Illinois



You know you're not in Kansas anymore when the owners of a provocatively revamped horse stable in Chicago stroll you around their quirky neighborhood. Take that yellow house across the street—legend has it that the owner's father won it in a card game. The rest of the block is a crazy quilt of turn-of-the-century worker's cottages, bastardized Italianate three-flats, and clumsily composed yuppie townhouses known (not affectionately) as "Polish contractor specials."

Now this crazy quilt has a new patch: the Brick Weave House, so named by its architect, Jeanne Gang of Studio Gang Architects. Designed for advertising executives David Hernandez and Tereasa Surratt, the house is in gentrifying West Town, about two miles northwest of the muscular skyline of Chicago's Loop. The house's name comes from its most distinctive feature, a tall, two-sided, technically adventurous brick screen that shelters a walled garden and gives the owners the privacy they crave while letting honeycomb patterns of natural light pour inside. At night, the brick screen becomes a dazzling light box.

Tereasa Surratt (above) and Jack, a friend's German shepherd mix, hang out in the kitchen, where appliances are hidden behind aluminum-and-frosted-glass wardrobes from Ikea. David Hernandez (below) and Jack enjoy the house's walled garden.



At the edge of the dining room, with its eclectic collection of fixtures and furnishings, orange velvet curtains playfully frame an opening to the skylit garage. It serves as a kind of sculpture gallery for motorcycles and cars, including one of Surratt's favorites, a yellow 1968 Camaro Rally Sport.

The house's interior is, in its own way, equally unconventional. There is no kitchen island, no flat-screen TV, no basement, no attic. What really sets the house apart, though, is the playful theatricality with which Gang spotlights Hernandez and Surratt's collection of cars and motorcycles. They're displayed like sculptures, on view from the dining room through a curtain-framed opening that leads directly into the garage. The detail is emblematic of how Gang embraced her clients' individuality, making art out of idiosyncrasy.

In the 1880s the house was a wood-frame stable; over the years it grew haphazardly, slowly encrusting with brick additions, a lean-to structure, and some god-awful postwar siding. "During construction, we found large mammal bones—we assumed they were horses', not humans'," says Hernandez, 42, managing director and executive creative director of the Chicago office of Tribal DDB Worldwide. He bought the property in 1999, attracted by its convenient, close-in location; its extrawide lot (40 feet as opposed to the 25-foot Chicago standard); and the high-ceilinged stable space, a perfect spot to store cars and "wrench on projects." Yet the place was so ugly that when Surratt drove Hernandez home on one of their first dates, he had her drop him off a block away so she wouldn't see it.

Phase one of its transformation occurred in 2003 with a made-for-TV makeover by Nate Berkus, Oprah Winfrey's interior designer, who redid the back of the house as a sexy bachelor pad. Berkus punched a big window in the back wall, splashed the floor with orange paint, and threw in Barcelona chairs and other hip furniture—enough, in other words, to look good on TV. Yet Hernandez wanted more. He pondered a restoration that would celebrate the weathered barn doors and other historic details. But excavation revealed that too much of the original structure was gone to make authentic the rehab he had sketched on tracing paper. "It was too Disneyland," he says. "It was a facade for something that was false."

Instead, he and Surratt, 37, a creative director at Ogilvy Chicago, opted for a complete remake. On the recommendation of a friend, they hired Gang, who had won plaudits for innovative civic designs ▸




Elliott Erwitt | Personal Exposures
michelcomte

and will soon complete an 82-story mixed-use Chicago skyscraper, believed to be the tallest building designed by a woman. Her decision to redo the stable—her first completed house—inverted the usual order of architects working their way up from houses to larger commissions. But she was attracted by the prospect of collaborating with two visual types who were passionate about design and promised not to get in her way. "Our carrot is that we'll be the best clients you ever have," Surratt recalls telling her. "Now here's the $5 budget." Actually, it was $140 a square foot, which comes out to about $450,000 for what is now a 3,200-square-foot house.

Gang's first big move subtracted an 800-square-foot chunk of the house's front, making room for the brick screen and walled garden. The screen, which consists of Norman brick with custom-made hardware in the joints, is supported by steel columns and beams that extend outward from the roof as well as horizontal trusses embedded in mortar. It is the latest in Gang's experiments with materials, making what is usually heavy and solid seem light, almost porous. Though the result may not convince those who insist that a house's windows and doors should suggest a human face, it is not anti-urban.

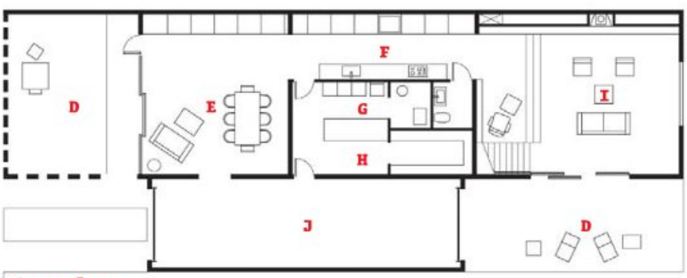
"It's not a wall; people come and stare through," Gang says. The house is more social than it seems on account of its street-facing garage, which lets the couple visit with neighbors who park their cars on the street or slide up their own garage doors and tinker with their cars. Call it "gearhead urbanism."

In the tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright, the route to the front door is adventurous, forcing you to make a couple of turns and pass through the walled garden's soaring space. Once inside, you quickly grasp how Gang met and exceeded her clients' brief: flowing spaces suitable for big parties, integrated storage that compensates for the absence of an attic or basement, a small kitchen, and upstairs rooms that can convert to bedrooms.





Second Floor



First Floor

Brick Weave House Floor Plans

A Bedroom
B Bedroom/Study
C Family Room
D Garden
E Dining Room
F Kitchen
G Laundry/Mechanical
H Storage
I Living Room
J Garage

Hernandez and Surratt relax in the living room (opposite), which is enlivened by the house's internal topography. A short flight of steps divides the interconnected areas and offers a place to sit. Above is a loft that can be converted to a bedroom. In the light-flooded living room, Hernandez does a little work on a 1976 Italian-made Harley-Davidson SXT 125.


PETER LINDBERGH
PICASSO
Elliott Erwitt | Personal Exposures
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Gang's first big move subtracted an 800-square-foot chunk of the house's front, making room for the brick screen and walled garden. The screen, which consists of Norman brick with custom-made hardware in the joints, is supported by steel columns and beams that extend outward from the roof as well as horizontal trusses embedded in mortar. It is the latest in Gang's experiments with materials, making what is usually heavy and solid seem light, almost porous. Though the result may not convince those who insist that a house's windows and doors should suggest a human face, it is not anti-urban.

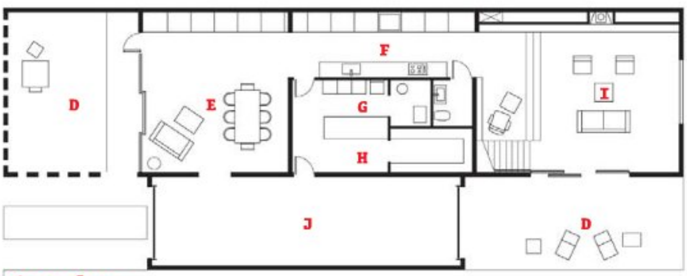
"It's not a wall; people come and stare through," Gang says. The house is more social than it seems on account of its street-facing garage, which lets the couple visit with neighbors who park their cars on the street or slide up their own garage doors and tinker with their cars. Call it "gearhead urbanism."

In the tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright, the route to the front door is adventurous, forcing you to make a couple of turns and pass through the walled garden's soaring space. Once inside, you quickly grasp how Gang met and exceeded her clients' brief: flowing spaces suitable for big parties, integrated storage that compensates for the absence of an attic or basement, a small kitchen, and upstairs rooms that can convert to bedrooms.





Second Floor



First Floor

Brick Weave House Floor Plans

A Bedroom
B Bedroom/Study
C Family Room
D Garden
E Dining Room
F Kitchen
G Laundry/Mechanical
H Storage
I Living Room
J Garage

Hernandez and Surratt relax in the living room (opposite), which is enlivened by the house's internal topography. A short flight of steps divides the interconnected areas and offers a place to sit. Above is a loft that can be converted to a bedroom. In the light-flooded living room, Hernandez does a little work on a 1976 Italian-made Harley-Davidson SXT 125.

The master bathroom (bottom left), with its frosted glass walls and chair (rescued from the trash pile and rehabbed), is large and elegant enough to serve as a gathering place for parties. When open, the garage (bottom right) enables the owners to work on their vehicles while visiting with neighbors who do the same. In the master bedroom (opposite), the couple enjoy the ample natural light that filters through the brick screen.

To accomplish all this, Gang reversed the previous floor plan, converting the high-ceilinged stable to two floors of living space while placing the new garage on the house's flanks, where before there had been living space. The key is that the vehicle storage and the house are integrated, not separated. From the sleekly furnished dining room, you peer straight into the garage through an opening accented by orange velvet curtains. You'll see a yellow 1968 Camaro Rally Sport or a mauve and black 1966 Dodge Monaco 500. "One of my first boyfriends had this car—same color," Gang says of the Dodge. The concrete floor in the dining room has tire tracks from Surratt's Ducati Monster Dark 750 motorcycle, which is occasionally invited in.

Gang lined the west side of the house's first floor with inexpensive Ikea aluminum-and-frosted-glass wardrobes, even tucking a fridge and other kitchen appliances behind them. The narrow, low-ceilinged galley kitchen, which has no upper-level cabinets (they would have been claustrophobic, the clients say) sets up for a classic architectural game of "compress and release." Pass through it and you enter a living room that extends the full width of the house, with 20-foot ceilings and no big TV; a projector displays video on the wall instead. Wood stairs cascade down from the second floor. Concrete steps separate the living room from an adjoining library. These details create a strong sense of internal topography. There's more spatial excitement upstairs in the master bedroom, where floor-to-ceiling glass offers views out onto the walled garden. Despite its tight lot the place feels expansive and serene.

Even as her clients gave her free aesthetic reign, Gang gave them something in return: a house whose architecture is at once assertive and responsive. It accommodates all aspects of their lifestyle, from their cars to their choices about deemphasizing what is celebrated in other homes to their collections of furniture and other items purchased from flea markets and yard sales. It works in part because Surratt and Hernandez display all their things so well, but also because Gang didn't insist on total visual control. This is a livable modernism, one that accepts—and makes a virtue of—the quirks of its clients rather than ruthlessly editing them out.







E

We make it E-Z to identify Eichler from Ellwood from Entenza as we work our way A–Z through the must-know terms of a modernist's vocab.

Charles and Ray Eames (1907–1978, 1912–1988)
These Cranbrook Academy of Art grads turned mid-century-modernist power couple are a case study in good design. Charles and Ray's prolific partnership took shape with the molded plywood chair in the 1940s, but the duo also dabbled in film, exhibition installations, toys, and even a miniature train in Los Angeles's Griffith Park.



Egg Chair
Arne Jacobsen created the Egg chair in 1958 to furnish the lobby of Copenhagen's new SAS Royal Hotel, which he also designed. The swiveling armchair's large headrest enveloped its sitter, fostering intimacy in the public space. Fifty years later, its organic form enlivened another environment: a concept McDonald's in London.

Joseph Eichler (1900–1974)
Developer Joseph Eichler sold dreams of suburban happiness with each of the 11,000 modern tract houses he built between 1950 and1974. Designed by prominent architects like A.Quincy Jones, the homes featured glass walls, atriums, and open floor plans. Today he's a noun you can live in.



Yngve Ekström (1913–1988)
Not to be confused with metal guitar god Yngwie Malmsteen, Yngve Ekström is the cofounder of Swedese, a furniture producer based in, of all places, Sweden. The company hit its stride with Ekström's 1956 Lamino chair, which became an icon of Nordic design and provided the template for decades of Ikea knockoffs. Ekström served at Swedese for over 40 years until his death in 1988.

Elevation
Of all architectural drawings, perspectives may get the glory, but elevations offer the invaluable information on how a finished building should look. These orthographic-projection renderings represent a three-dimensional vertical feature, most often a facade, in a scaled two-dimensional drawing and are labeled according to the direction the feature faces.

Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967)
Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson is both a one-time break-dancing champion and a solo exhibitioner in some of the world's most renowned galleries. His large-scale installation *The Weather Project*, at London's Tate Modern in 2003 and 2004, encouraged visitors to take to the floor in a different way—by lying down on cold, hard concrete to gaze at an artificial sun and never-ending sky.

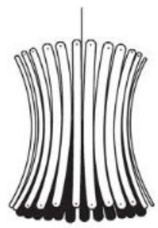
Craig Ellwood (1922–1992)
In the 1940s, "Craig Ellwood" was the person nearest the ringing phone at the Craig Ellwood Incorporated construction company. Cofounder Jon Nelson Burke adopted the name full-time in the 1950s, and by the end of the '60s, "Ellwood" was synonymous with post–World War II California modernism and three of the iconic Case Study Houses.

Energy Star
More than just information on a bright yellow sticker to be peeled off new appliances, Energy Star ratings were the Environmental Protection Agency's 1992 effort to better educate consumers about energy consumption. The rating system and certification program now extends to vending machines and even homes.

arts & architecture

John Entenza (1903–1984)
John Entenza was to modernism what Anna Wintour is to fashion. Editor of *Arts & Architecture* magazine from 1940 until 1962, he was the first to publish and popularize the works of now-legendary designers such as Harry Bertoia, the Eameses, Craig Ellwood, and George Nakashima. He's best known for launching the Case Study House program in 1945.

Ergonomic Design
Though its synonymous science, human engineering, sounds better suited to lab than home or office, ergonomic design aims to align living and working environments with human physiology to optimize efficiency and minimize trips to the chiropractor. Shame it won't help you sort out your email inbox.



Luis Eslava (b. 1976)
Spanish designer Luis Eslava turns everyday eyesores into eye-catching items. He reinterprets their intended uses to produce new creations that range from a room-dividing curtain with hooks for hanging clothes to a pendant lamp made of strips of Velcro to a USB memory stick joined to a Virgin Mary statuette that proclaims: "Oh Maria keep my data safe."

Compiled by Miyoko Ohtake and Jordan Kushins

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The Norsk Face



When Lasse Altern Halvorsen and Marianne Lien took a seven-month trip around the world, it wasn't what they found on their travels that made the biggest impact; it was what they'd left behind. Noting that their Norwegian homeland lacked a presence and identity in markets abroad (although a certain cruise line comes to mind), Halvorsen, an architect, and Lien, who has a background in advertising, founded Pur Norsk in 2006. The Oslo-based boutique and extensive online shop is the world's first concept store focusing exclusively on Norwegian design. Dwell recently spoke to Halvorsen about the venture.



1

What's best about your job?
We've been able to start a company with a concept we believe in as well as design some of our own products. We're happy to have the opportunity to chat with our clients and explain the history behind the pieces.

What are your criteria for selecting an item to sell?
It has to be something that Marianne and I both like. We're also looking for products that fit together well.

How do you define "good design"?
Being an architect, it might sound like a cliché, but I believe in the balance between form, material, and function. Good design has the ability to survive over time.

Is there an object that changed how you think about design?
The Prada store in Tokyo really blew my mind. It was designed by the Swiss firm Herzog + de Meuron, who also made the "Bird's Nest" at the Beijing Olympics.

Why is Oslo a good place for a design shop?
Oslo is undergoing a transformation, with a new generation of designers and artists who are growing up and want to do something different than what has been done before. People abroad are finding it a bit more exotic, too.



2

Is your home like your shop?
Since we started Pur Norsk, we've been much more focused on new, local things. But our home has a nice mix, with the stuff I've inherited from my parents and Marianne has inherited from hers. It doesn't really look like our shop, and I think that's healthy; it's nice to get a break.



3

What was your first big design purchase?
My first furniture purchase with my first salaried paycheck was our sofa by the Swedish company David Design about ten years ago. It actually has a very nice Norwegian wool fabric, so even at that time I picked out something that had to do with Norway.

What are you currently longing for?
More time to design and produce our own products under the Pur Norsk brand and to nurse the small architectural commissions.

Story by Jordan Kushins
Photos by Felix Brüggemann

1. Dachs on Wheels by Olav Øen.
2. Scandia chair by Hans Brattrud for Fjordfiesta.
3. Hangman shelf by & Sons and Pur Norsk. Available from purnorsk.no.


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For a good decade and a half, owners of open-plan homes have smiled as public interest grew, prices rose, and once-ignored architects were rediscovered. Mid-century-modern homes in suburbs nationwide were suddenly hip and ripe for restoration. Cities followed suit as suave and sophisticated glass-walled condos and lofts sprung up everywhere—from Herzog + de Meuron's 40 Bond Street in New York to the Vogel House by Neumann Monson Architects in Iowa City—suggesting that the long-held promise of modern living on a national scale was finally coming to fruition, or at least gaining ground on the featureless tract homes and by-the-numbers townhouses that had long held sway.

Then, starting in 2006, house prices began to slide. They were plummeting by 2007, as homeowners who'd taken advantage of some dubious financial gymnastics—including loans granted with no down payment and little attention paid to the buyer's finances—were unable to pay their mortgages.

What former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan once called "froth" on the housing market had turned out to be an untenable bubble whose subsequent burst would leave global real estate markets in shambles. Modern developments were not immune. Among the saddest casualties of the downturn was the Racquet Club of Palm Springs, a once-iconic tennis club with adjoining residences, some by modernist Albert Frey. The walls of its historic buildings were opened up for restoration and foundations were laid for new residences, then work stopped. The result is a dusty ghost town.

Though things are unremittingly lousy at present, there is hope for modern real estate. Parts of the country are still seeing modern buildings keep pace with and even outstrip traditional construction. In the Denver area, through 2008, modern tract homes were selling for 40 percent more than their traditional counterparts, according to broker Craig Mayer of Mile Hi Modern. Mid-century designs also continue to perform better in several areas of Southern California, including Palm Springs and the San Fernando Valley. Though overall prices have declined, residents and brokers say, modern homes still sell for more than their non-modern neighbors. Good news or cold comfort?

In addition to frozen lines of credit, nervous bankers, and buyers wary of the bottom falling out of their investments, modernism still faces the same challenges as ever from a real estate market with little regard for design.

In the mainstream, modern residential real estate has developed as a niche industry, with trained brokers, lenders, and appraisers who understand the market for modern homes enough to connect savvy buyers with savvy sellers. In no part of the country, though, can sellers simply assume that the average broker will get the best price for their modern home—or ensure its continued existence by steering it to a sympathetic buyer.

An Introduction to Modern Real Estate



Though the market has rarely looked worse, our primer on the past, present, and future of modern real estate gives you the inside track on why modern homes are always a good investment.

Story by Dave Weinstein
Illustrations by Damien Correll

Whether sipping cocktails with Realtors or just aiming to impress the condo board, this smattering of modern real estate facts will keep you out of social foreclosure.

Nationwide, glass-walled beauties are often marketed less on their artistry, construction, and history than on their number of bedrooms and square footage—or, more ominously, the size of the lot.

Modern homes have been a specialty market since the late 1940s, when the first modern tracts were built. Ned Eichler, who ran marketing for his father, Northern California developer Joseph Eichler, decided early on that modern buyers were a different sort of beast and went out of his way to cater to them. At the other end of the spectrum, a specialized market in high-end modern homes began to develop in the late 1960s. British jetsetter Lord Peter Palumbo got the ball rolling in 1968 when he purchased Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House outside Plano, Illinois, the way a collector might buy a painting.

The idea of collecting fine architecture came into its own in the 1990s, when Los Angeles enthusiasts like David Zander, Joel Silver, and a battery of film stars started investing in classic modern homes. Realty firms that specialized in modern and other architecturally distinguished homes grew up to serve high-end buyers.

The 1990s also saw design-savvy buyers flocking to modern tracts, snapping up properties that had once been ignored. Local brokers quickly specialized in modern homes.

In the future, though, real growth will come from homes that are energy-efficient, are close to urban amenities, and foster a sense of community. Green-designed condos, townhouses, and clustered housing were just making their marks before the current downturn, and, though money is scarce, the premises of these projects—aesthetically and environmentally—remain vital and sound.

"A piece of architecture is always going to be worth more than the generic house next door with no design value whatsoever," says Brian Linder, a broker with the Value of Architecture in Los Angeles.



Words you should know

Automated Valuation Models: Formulas used with increasing frequency by appraisers to value a home based on standardized criteria, making it hard to factor in good design.

CC&Rs: Covenants, conditions, and restrictions imposed on homeowners in many condo complexes and other neighborhoods. Though cumbersome, they can boost the integrity and value of homes.

Common Area Assessments: Also known as homeowners' association fees, they maintain common areas, pools, and the like in condo and townhouse communities and some planned unit developments.

Comparative Market Analysis: Also called "comparables," or "comps," this is used by lenders to determine a home's value. There's disagreement over whether it should be based on size alone or take design into account as well.

Farming: A real estate broker who cultivates a restricted segment of homes or buyers, or who focuses on a certain neighborhood, is "farming" it. More and more brokers are modern farmers.

Loan-to-Value (LTV) Ratio: This indicates what percentage of a home's appraised value or agreed-upon sales price will be funded by the lender.

Multiple Listing Service (MLS): A database that lets agents post homes for sale.

Planned-Unit Development (PUD): Can refer to condos, where common areas are jointly owned, but it can also apply to neighborhoods with single-family homes. PUDs became a common development strategy in the early 1960s to achieve more flexible neighborhood planning. ▶

❶ Perhaps the earliest community of modern homes, Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart, Germany, was designed in 1927 by Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and other notable architects affiliated with the Deutscher Werkbund. Eleven of the 27 homes survive, some still as residences.

❷ Some say that just 2 percent of single-family homes in the U.S. are designed by architects—but the American Institute of Architects pegs it closer to 28 percent.

That's So 04

When it comes to creating a sense of community, cozying up to your neighbor proves that density rules.



Not every lover of modern living wants, or can afford, to buy a mid-century classic or live in a suburban tract. We are increasingly an urban nation, and the cultural, economic, and social appeals of the city burn ever more brightly as legions of Americans move back into town.

Those heading into the city can find good values in modern multiunit complexes, many of which take a commitment to green design and fostering a sense of community to heart. Jeff Krolicki, senior associate for Dick Clark Architecture in Austin, Texas, provided the newly hip South Congress neighborhood with a local landmark: the 04 Lofts, a five-story, steel-framed structure sided with glass and local bricks. Units range from a 980-square-foot studio to the two-bedroom penthouses, still rather modest at 1,600 feet apiece, though each has a garden or balcony and access to the communal roof deck.

Krolicki credits the developers for not maximizing the project's square footage, which allowed him to preserve the site's mature oaks. And to promote pedestrianism in this mixed-use space, parking is in a separate building.

The 04 Lofts are infill at its best. Residents walk to restaurants, bars, galleries, and shops. The condos, which are in a new building, are part of a mixed-use development that includes a grocer, a restaurant, stores, and professional offices in a renovated car dealership.

The developer "wanted a building that looked like it had been there forever," and envisioned it as something traditional, Krolicki says. "But modern is more appropriate to that area."

One of South Congress's big events is an annual hot rod show, a fact that helped sway one of the developers, who collects vintage cars. "There's a rockabilly feeling to South Congress," Krolicki says. "That's part of its charm." ▶





Photos by Paul Bardagjy

❸ Condominiums, long popular overseas, got their U.S. start in Puerto Rico in 1958. The Federal Housing Administration didn't recognize condo ownership until 1961.

❹ In California, the Mills Act provides tax relief to homeowners who preserve their historic architecture. Similar tax rebate and abatement programs exist in other states.


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Lowering the Bar

A modernist facade can't keep some developments from suffering from that very American malady: sprawl.



Mid-century-modern tract homes have long been coveted by lovers of all things retro, many of whom began gentrifying neighborhoods of them in the mid-1990s. By the early aughts' skyrocketing prices proved too high. So why not build brand-new, affordable, modern 1950s-style homes?

The result of this thinking is B-Bar-H Ranch, a neighborhood of about 50 houses in five jaunty designs based on the 1950s Alexander homes of Palm Springs. But despite their retro styling, the homes look neither authentically 1950s nor truly of our time. The development is an aesthetic orphan, in dialogue with neither its idols nor its contemporaries. The B-Bar-H has turned "modern" into just another picture-book style. Like the neo-Tudors or neo-Victorians still erected today, B-Bar-H's commitment to modernism is little more than skin-deep.

To construct affordable homes, Modern Living Spaces, which built B-Bar-H, had to find affordable land. That meant leaving Palm Springs and building on a windswept, 100-year floodplain in an unincorporated area near Desert Hot Springs, where the local landmark is an immense wind farm and swirling dust storms are a seasonal event.

Desert modernism of the 1950s, of course, was never about infill or ecological living. But that was then. Modernism today needs to embrace sustainability, just as its Bauhaus forebears made do with few materials and limited resources after World War I. Modern neighborhoods that sprawl into nearly raw desert signal a clear break from the ethos of the architectural pioneers they seek to emulate. When style is more about pastiche than about innovation, what's the use? Time capsules angling to cash in on a look are modern design at its worst, addressing neither the desires, the aesthetics, nor the needs of the day. ►



Photo by Tom Brewster

5 Being part of a local, state, or national historic district helps increase property values significantly, according to numerous academic and governmental studies.

6 According to owner Elizabeth Harris, when Richard Neutra's iconic Kaufmann House in Palm Springs came on the market in the 1990s, the broker told Harris they could "make it more stylish by making it Spanish, or we could take it down." They ended up restoring the home with architects at Marmol Radziner.



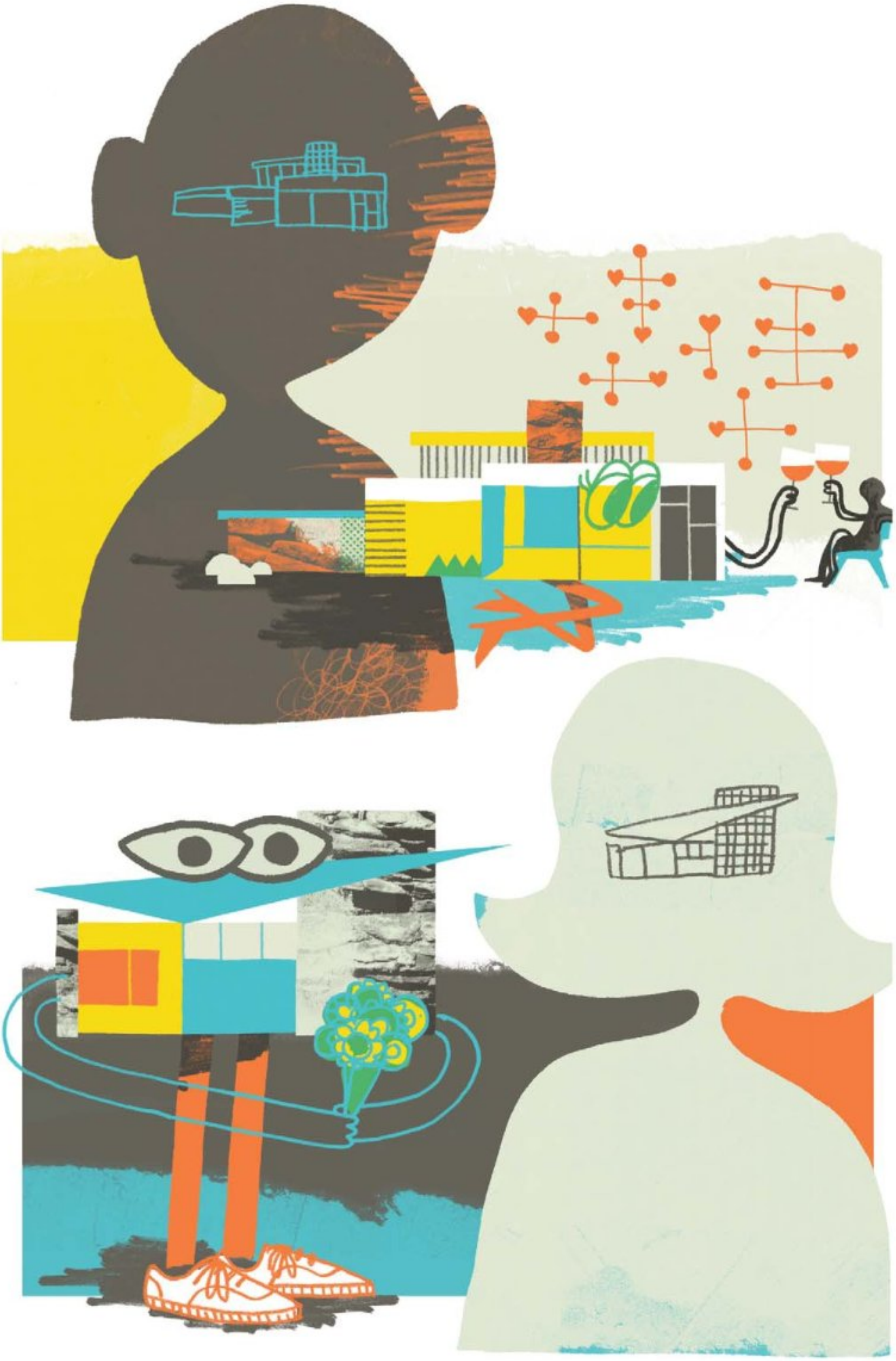
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Here's a story you'll hear often when visiting owners of modern homes: "We love our house, but when we sell it, we know the new owners will tear it down or redo it to death. The land is valuable, and buyers prefer Tuscan."

But what if there were a way to reach the growing number of modern fans, avoiding Tuscan lovers entirely? A matchmaking service for modern homes linking sympathetic buyers and sellers and making both happy?

"It's a big concern in the architectural real-estate community—people buying the land for its value, then bulldozing," says Brian Linder, the Los Angeles broker whose website, the Value of Architecture, is one of several that are trying to function as modern matchmakers. "My goal," he says, "is to form a network of architectural Realtors nationwide."

Linder is making a push, focusing on Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Seattle. But broad swaths of the West Coast are still uncharted. "We don't have a business model for it per se," he says. "We're just a network of like-minded Realtors."

A national network of such sites would empower design-minded home buyers making cross-country moves, or just moves across town, and help bolster an industry that's seriously flagging. It would also encourage a brand of popular preservation, so when an endangered home swims into view, like a recent Rudolph Schindler that's in such sad shape it might face destruction, those inclined toward to the modern cause will get a crack at it before the wrecking ball does.

Regional Modern Real Estate

Denver
milehimodern.com

Oklahoma
movemodern.com

North Carolina
moderncharlotte.com

@ For our list of modern Realtors visit dwell.com

❷ In the mid-2000s, condo developers in New York began hawking starchitect-designed buildings—such as Gwathmey Siegel's Astor Place and Richard Meier's 173/176 Perry Street towers—as brand names. It worked: Buyers like Martha Stewart and Nicole Kidman, who bought at Perry Street, flocked to the buildings.

September 12+13

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The popular San Francisco Living: Home Tours weekend is the first tour series of its kind in the Bay Area to promote a wide variety of architectural styles, neighborhoods, and residences—all from the architect's point of view. Don't miss it this September!

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Clockwise from top left: Courtesy of Boor Bridges Architecture, © Marion Brenner, Courtesy of Strachan Forgan, © Ken Gutmaker Photography

Up-Front Appraisals

If real estate is too risky an investment, how about futures? Tea leaves, please.



Lending

Monica Di Perna, a mortgage consultant with Guarantee Mortgage in San Francisco, specializes in high-end homes on the West Coast.

"Financing has been hard lately, obviously, because lenders have been demanding more money down. Over the next few months or year, it's going to be easier to get financing, because there will be more loan products out there at slightly better rates.

"In the short term, people who purchase properties on the high end will get really good bargains. But home prices will rise. It will be just like the Internet bust a few years ago. People said the collapse of the dot-coms would ruin the economy, but it didn't.

"People had been buying homes with air. It was like a drug pusher coming around and saying, 'I've got a loan for you as long as you can breathe.' In the future, you will need to breathe and have a job, money in the bank, and good credit scores.

"Everybody thinks interest rates will be going up. They should go up. We're printing money, and we're stimulating the economy so tremendously, so you would think we're going to have hyperinflation in the coming years. I think that. But so does everybody. So we're probably wrong."

Heritage

Crosby Doe, of Crosby Doe Associates in Los Angeles, has marketed houses by Richard Neutra, Frank Lloyd Wright, and John Lautner.

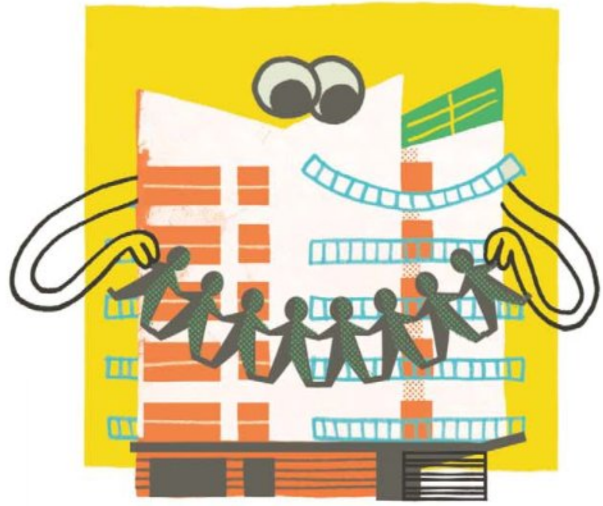
"As architecture is added to museum collections, there will be an exponential increase in awareness of the importance of maintaining or restoring its integrity. When Neutra's Kaufmann House was restored, the original Thermador ovens were restored and kept. This type of thinking will be much more appreciated.

"Classic modern homes have been selling at a premium, but it's not the premium that these internationally recognized landmarks should be getting. There's a Frank Lloyd Wright for $7.7 million that has been recognized as one of the key residential properties in the country. But an Andy Warhol painting will sell for $33 million! That disconnect amazes me.

"Lenders and appraisers need to open their eyes and minds and come to understand that if a Picasso is worth more than a paint-by-number painting, a work of architecture is worth exponentially more than the tract house next door, even if they are the same square footage on the same size lot.

"Slowly architecture will move out of the pricing structures that have been kept artificially low by appraisals based strictly on the terms of real estate. Then more owners, investors, and collectors will be inclined to spend the sums necessary to properly restore and maintain our modernist heritage."





Living Together

Jeff Oberdorfer is the executive director of First Community Housing, a nonprofit that builds and manages green housing in Silicon Valley.

"You're going to see much more multifamily housing over the next ten years. In order to confront global warming and be sustainable, we're going to have to move away from the single-family, rectilinear lot in the suburbs. You are going to see more density, and that's hard for some people. So architects are going to have to showcase some examples of dense housing with the appropriate amenities that people find attractive.

"First, housing needs to be near retail and mass transit. The market is moving toward mixed-use, infill developments with housing, retail, offices, and services. There can be libraries on the ground floor or health clubs or even shopping below housing.

"We'll also be seeing more studio units for people under 30 or over 55 and retired—people who want to live in small spaces and have all the urban cultural amenities, including recreational spaces, coffee shops, and onsite gardens. People want common facilities for social activities, and a real sense of community."

The highest price paid for a modern house at auction was $7.5 million, in 2003, for Mies van der Rohe's glass-box Farnsworth House, despite its history of repeatedly flooding. Today the Farnsworth House is a museum run by the nonprofit Landmarks Illinois.

The first tract of modern homes to become a National Register historic district was Arapahoe Acres, near Denver, in 1998.



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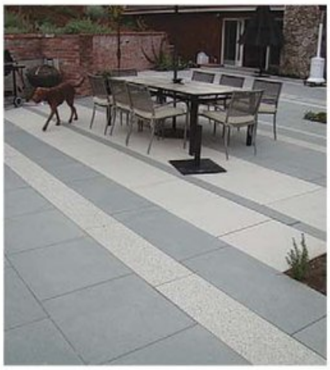
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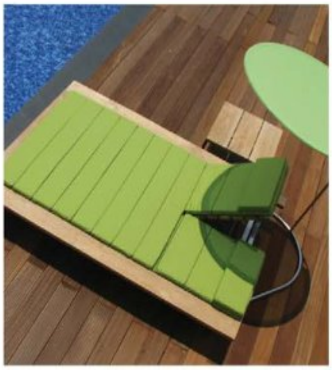


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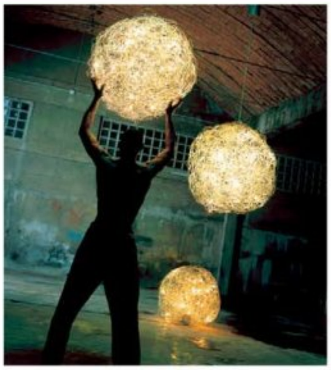
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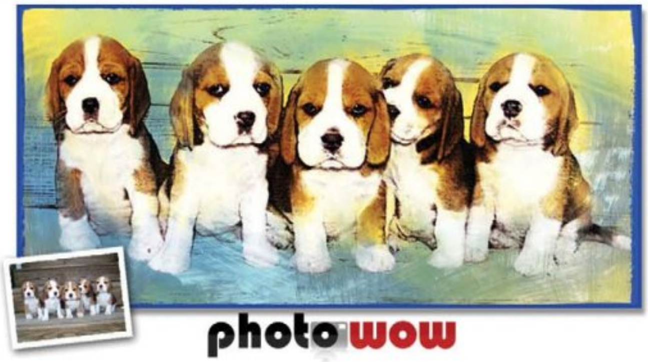


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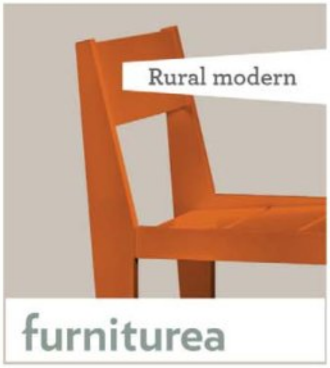


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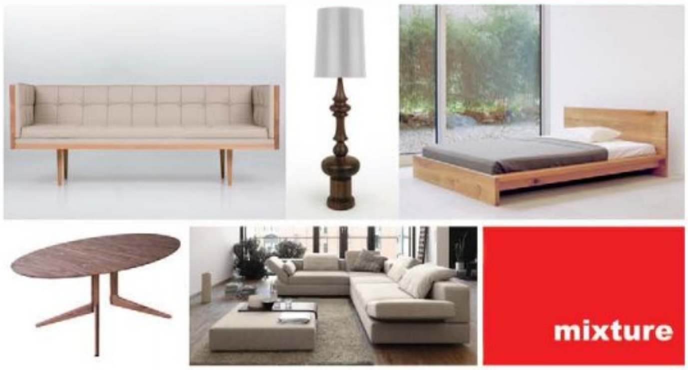


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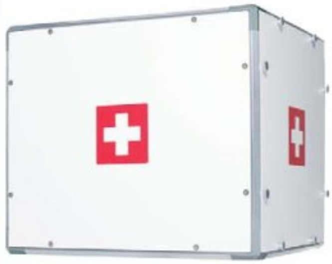
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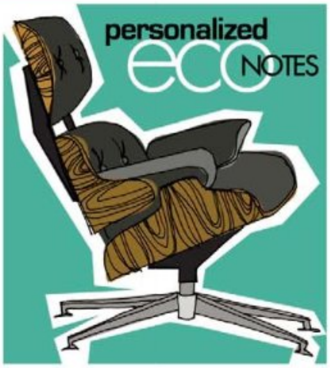


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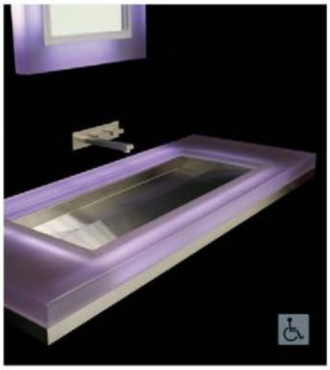


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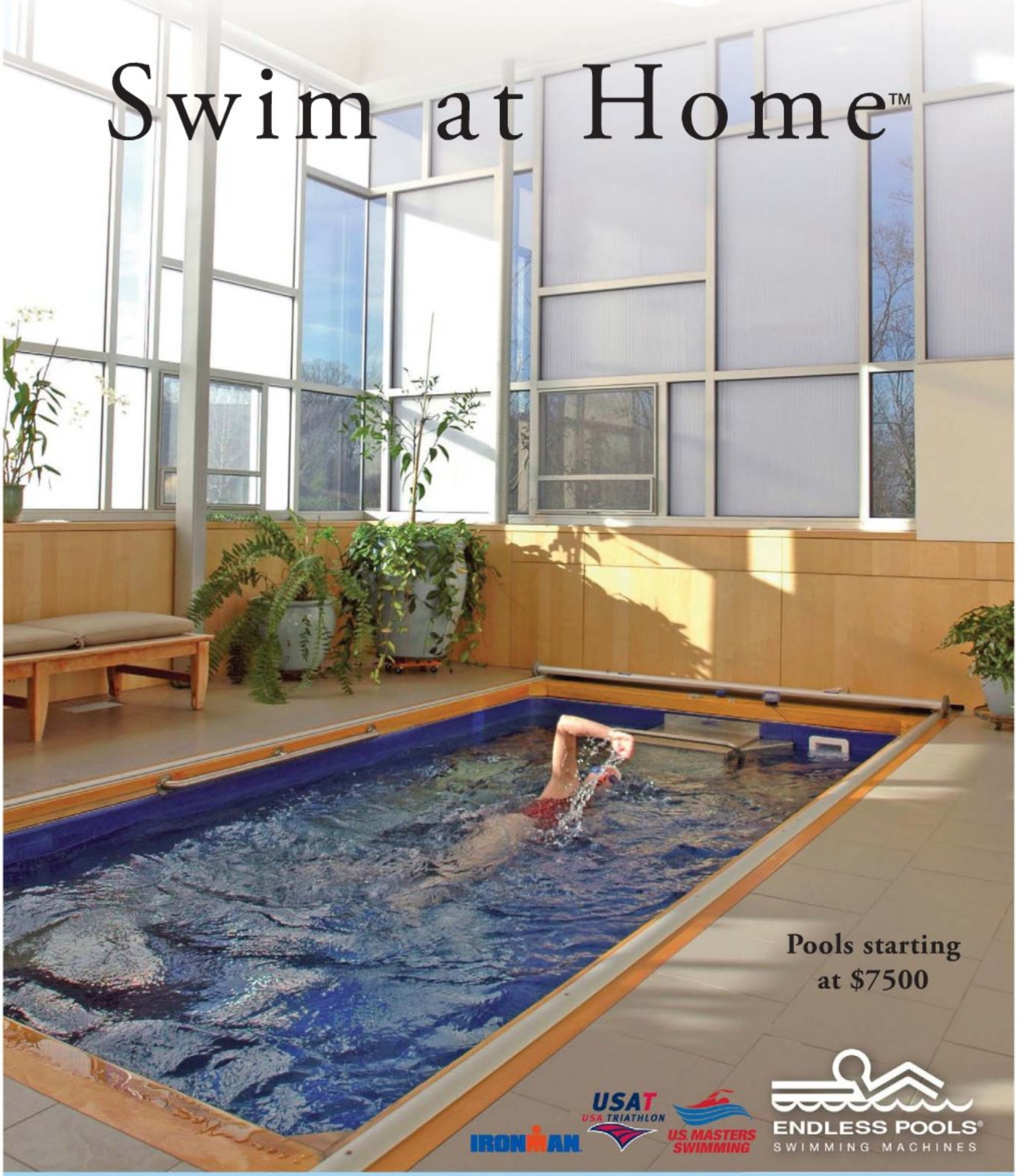


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By the Book

Story by Miyoko Ohtake

In the 19th century, architectural pattern books brought design (albeit primarily neoclassical and Greek Revival) to the masses. Equipped with a basic skill level and these instruction manuals that came complete with plans and renderings, builders from New York to New Orleans could create facades of Ionic columns and decorative cornices.

Auburn University Rural Studio's $20K House project is the architectural pattern book's modern-day counterpart. The project challenges students to design and build homes for $20,000 or less. The goal is that builders will eventually replicate these prototypes for hopeful homeowners who live below the poverty line and thus qualify for a federal rural development loan.

In 2008, students Drew Coshow, Robert Douge, Abigail Grubb, and Steven Ward designed the Pattern Book House. Nestled in a wooded area of Greensboro, Alabama, the house is a log cabin for the 21st century that harks back to the how-to books of yore both in name and with its own building manual, currently in the works.



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